Paul's First Letter to the church in Corinth

An Exposition of *1 Corinthians*

A Verse-by-Verse Exposition
with Historical Notes and Application

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Paul's First Letter

to the church in Corinth

**** Verse-by-Verse Exposition of 1 Corinthians with Notes***

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Introduction

The church in Corinth provides us with a striking window into the life of God's people in the first century. Many today dismiss Corinth as a "dumpster fire" of problems — a chaotic community to be avoided, not emulated. Such an attitude is not only shallow, it is insane.

Why? Because in God's sovereign wisdom, He chose to preserve this letter — not as a record of a failed church, but as a testimony of Christ's work in a real situation of weakness, conflict, and immaturity. Corinth is not a picture of what to despise, but of how God operates in actual human circumstances to build His church.

Far from being a failure, the Corinthian church was a vessel in God's stream of life. The Spirit was present, the gifts of grace abounded, and Christ was revealed in the midst of all their shortcomings. To study 1 Corinthians is to step into the living classroom of God's grace and government — a church that was messy, yes, but alive with Christ's reality.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians speaks directly to the problems of division, immorality, immaturity, and disorder, yet always points back to Christ as the solution. For us today, this is not a warning to avoid churches like Corinth, but a call to recognize that God's testimony is never in perfect human order — it is in Christ being expressed in real people, in real places, with real struggles.

A Word to the Reader

Some may wonder why I am so detailed in this study, especially in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians. I must admit, in a way I feel I should apologize for my verbosity. Yet I believe it is necessary.

In my experience, I have encountered many attitudes in today's Christianity toward the Corinthian church — and even toward Paul himself — that are inaccurate and unacceptable. Some dismiss Corinth as a hopeless mess, something to be avoided. Others openly question Paul's apostleship, as though his writings were of lesser authority.

Because of this, I feel compelled to carefully unpack these verses. The details matter. Every phrase Paul wrote was chosen by the Spirit of God, and every phrase reveals something vital for us today. If my words seem many, it is only because I want to clear away misconceptions and let the truth of Scripture shine clearly.

Chapters 1–4 — Christ, the Cross, and the Church as God's Building

1 Corinthians 1:1–3 — Salutation

KJV Text
Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:
Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 1 — Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother

• **Paul's identity**: He identifies himself not by personal achievement, but by divine calling. Called to be an apostle highlights that apostleship is not a career choice but a sovereign appointment. Paul was formerly a persecutor; now he is sent one — entirely by God's will.

• **Through the will of God**: This echoes Galatians 1:1, where Paul stresses that his apostleship is not 'from men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.' This is foundational in a letter addressing factions — Paul's authority rests not on party allegiance but on divine commission.

• **Sosthenes our brother**: Likely the same synagogue ruler beaten before Gallio in Acts 18:17. Once hostile, now a brother and co-laborer. This reveals the transforming grace of God and subtly reminds the Corinthians: divisions dissolve in Christ. A former Jew hostile to Paul is now his companion.

Sidebar — Objections to Paul's Apostleship (Then and Now)

In Paul's day:

• Judaizers questioned him because he wasn't one of the Twelve.
• Factions in Corinth compared him unfavorably to Apollos or Peter.
• False apostles openly slandered him (2 Cor. 11:13).

In later centuries:

• Some heretical groups claimed Paul's teaching contradicted Jesus'.
• Even today, skeptics online say Paul 'invented Christianity' or was 'not a real apostle.'

God's answer:

• The risen Christ appeared to Paul and directly commissioned him (Acts 9:15–16).
• The other apostles recognized him as a true co-worker (Gal. 2:9).
• Peter explicitly affirmed Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

👉 To reject Paul is to reject part of God's Word. Opposition to Paul has always existed, but it has never overthrown God's choice.

Sidebar — Who Was Sosthenes?

Sosthenes appears alongside Paul in the salutation of 1 Corinthians: 'Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother' (1 Cor. 1:1).

• **Background in Acts**: In Acts 18:17, Sosthenes is named as the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. When Paul's gospel was brought before the Roman proconsul Gallio, the case was dismissed. In the aftermath, Sosthenes was seized and beaten publicly.
• **Now a brother**: By the time 1 Corinthians was written, this same Sosthenes appears not as a synagogue ruler, but as 'our brother.' He had evidently come to faith in Christ and was now working with Paul.
• **Possible scribe**: Could Sosthenes have been the one who actually wrote the letter at Paul's dictation? It's possible. Paul often used scribes (e.g., 'I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord' — Rom. 16:22).
• **Significance for the Corinthians**: His name would have carried weight: a reminder of God's grace and their shared history.

👉 Whether co-sender, scribe, or both, Sosthenes' presence in the greeting underscores that Paul's letter is not a solitary voice but part of a living fellowship in Christ.

Verse 2 — Unto the church of God which is at Corinth…

• **Church of God**: Not 'church of Paul,' not 'church of Apollos,' not 'church of Cephas.' Despite their divisions, they are still God's church.

• **Which is at Corinth**: Locality defines the practical expression of the church. The universal church is expressed in local churches (e.g., 'at Corinth').

• **Sanctified in Christ Jesus**: Their holiness rests not on behavior but on union with Christ. Christ, the Son of God, passed through incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. Now

the Holy Spirit applies the reality of Christ's person and work to believers. Sanctification is therefore not self-effort but the Spirit's application of Christ to us.

• **Called saints**: The Greek text is simply klētois hagiois — 'called saints,' not 'called to be saints.' Paul is not saying they are something they ought to become in the future, but something they already are by God's calling. Their conduct may be deficient, but their identity is certain.

Sidebar — The Greek of 'Called Saints'

• The KJV renders the phrase as 'called to be saints.'
• But the Greek words are klētois hagiois — literally 'called saints.'
• The 'to be' is not in the Greek; it was added by translators for smoother English.
• Paul's meaning is clear: the Corinthians already are saints because God has called them.
• Their sainthood rests on divine calling, not on moral perfection or church recognition.

Contrast with later church tradition:

• **In later centuries**, especially in Catholic and Orthodox traditions, a saint came to mean an exalted believer who, after death, was canonized.
• **But Paul uses the word in a very different sense**. To him, all believers — even immature, struggling Corinthians — are saints because they are set apart in Christ by God's call.
• **This radically redefines sainthood**: it is not an honor bestowed by men, but an identity given by God.

👉 Every believer in Christ today, no matter how weak, is a saint. The issue is not becoming one, but living according to what we already are by God's grace.

Sidebar — How the Church in Corinth Began

• **Paul's travel to Corinth (Acts 18:1)**: After leaving Athens, Paul came to Corinth, a major city in Achaia. There he found Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers recently expelled from Rome.
• **Preaching in the synagogue (Acts 18:4–6)**: Each Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue. When opposition arose, Paul declared: 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.'
• **House next door (Acts 18:7–8)**: Paul then moved into the house of Justus. There, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. Many Corinthians also believed and were baptized.
• **The Lord's word of encouragement (Acts 18:9–11)**: The Lord appeared in a vision: 'Be not afraid, but speak… for I have much people in this city.' Paul remained a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.
• **Opposition before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17)**: The Jews brought Paul before Gallio, who dismissed the case. At this time, Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler, was beaten — the same man later named in 1 Cor. 1:1.
• **Companions in labor (Acts 18:5)**: Though Paul arrived alone, Silas and Timothy later joined him, strengthening the work.

👉 The church in Corinth was born not through ease, but through preaching, opposition, conversions, and the Lord's direct encouragement: 'I have much people in this city.'

Sidebar: Calling on the Name of the Lord — Receiving the Living Christ

- **Calling on the name of the Lord is one of the oldest and most life-giving practices in Scripture.** It is more than silent prayer — it is to audibly invoke the Lord, confess His name, and contact Him directly.
- **Genesis 4:26** — The Beginning: After the birth of Enosh, "men began to call on the name of the Lord." Humanity learned to take God as their portion in a darkened world.
- **The Patriarchs:** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all built altars and called on the Lord's name (Gen. 12:8; 26:25). Their calling was linked with God's building of His testimony.
- **The Psalms and Prophets**: "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised" (Ps. 18:3). Joel prophesied that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32) — a promise quoted at Pentecost (Acts 2:21) and by Paul (Rom. 10:13).
- **The Early Church**: Calling became a mark of believers. Saul persecuted "all who call on Your name" (Acts 9:14). After conversion, he himself began to call (Acts 22:16).
- **Paul's Teaching**: For Paul, calling was not a one-time event but a lifelong practice of receiving Christ as supply.
- **The Experiential Key**: When we call on the Lord, we get the Lord Himself. Just as calling a friend by name brings the person to you, calling "Lord Jesus!" brings the living Christ. Today, this is real because the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). When we call, we breathe Him in, enjoy His presence, and receive fresh grace and strength.

Verse 3 — Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

• **Grace and peace**: Grace is God Himself in Christ as our supply; peace is the result of enjoying that supply.
• **From God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ**: The source is divine and relational. Not just 'from God Almighty' but 'God our Father.' Paul immediately sets a family tone, reminding them of their shared Father and Lord.
• **The Triune pattern**: Even in this simple greeting, Paul views grace and peace as flowing from the Father as the source, through the Son as the channel, and applied to us by the Spirit.

Sidebar — Charis and Shalom

• **Grace (charis)**: In the Greco-Roman world, charis was a common greeting, much like saying 'greetings' or 'favor.' Paul fills it with divine meaning: grace is not just goodwill, but the living supply of God Himself in Christ.
• **Peace (shalom)**: In Jewish culture, shalom was the customary greeting, meaning wholeness and harmony under God's blessing.
• **Grace and peace together**: By combining the Greek and Jewish greetings, Paul unites two worlds in one phrase. Both Jews and Greeks heard something familiar, yet Paul lifted both higher in Christ.
• **The source**: These are not cultural niceties anymore, but spiritual realities 'from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.'

👉 In Paul's hands, ordinary greetings become eternal blessings.

1 Corinthians 1:4–9 — Thanksgiving for God's Grace

Verses 4–6

"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." (NKJV)

Exposition:

Paul begins not with the Corinthians' failures, but with gratitude. He thanks God for the grace they had received in Christ. Despite their immaturity and problems, they had indeed been "enriched in everything" — particularly in utterance (speaking, gifts of communication, prophecy, tongues) and knowledge (spiritual insight). These very areas later caused problems in Corinth, but Paul acknowledges them as genuine gifts of God's grace. The testimony of Christ was evident among them.

Verses 7–8

"So that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Exposition:

The Corinthians were not lacking in spiritual gifts. They eagerly awaited Christ's return, though often distracted by present controversies. Paul reminds them that it is God who will confirm them to the end. Their security rests not in their strength but in Christ's faithfulness. The goal: that they would stand blameless in the day of Christ.

Verse 9

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Exposition:

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God has called them into fellowship with His Son. Fellowship here is koinonia — joint participation, sharing in a common life. To have fellowship with Christ is to enjoy all that He is and all that He has done.

This means believers are not left to themselves. The Christian life is not mainly striving or performing, but enjoying Christ together — His grace, His Spirit, His riches. As John also writes: "…that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The result of this fellowship is joy and oneness.

Paul places this truth here as the foundation for everything that follows. Before addressing the Corinthians' problems, he reminds them: you are called to a shared participation in Christ Himself. That fellowship is sustained not by your strength but by God's faithfulness.

Sidebar: Paul's Pastoral Pattern

• **Thanksgiving before correction**: He affirms God's grace before addressing their problems.
• **Christ-centered focus**: Even when the church fails, Christ is the source of grace, gifts, and confirmation.
• **Fellowship in Christ**: The highest blessing — being called to share and enjoy all that Christ is.

Teaching Inset: Unworthy Critics of Corinth

It is astonishing that many in today's pulpits dismiss the church in Corinth as a hopeless "example of what not to do." But Paul says they were "enriched in everything…not lacking in any gift" (vv. 5, 7).

Those who criticize often represent congregations or movements that lack any manifestation of spiritual gifts, that do not eagerly await the Lord's coming, and that fail to see the church as fellowship in Christ. In truth, they are not even on the same playing field as Corinth.

Yes, Corinth needed correction — but they were a genuine local church, full of grace and gifts, addressed as God's testimony in their city. To condemn them from today's shallow or giftless Christianity is not only misguided, it betrays how far removed many "pseudo-churches" are from the New Testament pattern.

The lesson is not to sneer at Corinth, but to recover Paul's view: thanksgiving for grace, confidence in Christ's confirming power, and recognition that even a troubled church is God's possession and God's lampstand.

1 Corinthians 1:10–17 — Appeal for Unity in Christ

Verse 10

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Exposition (expanded):

Paul does not command harshly but pleads tenderly with the saints in Corinth. "Brethren" is inclusive — brothers and sisters. His appeal is not by his authority, nor by Paul's name, but by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is crucial. The name we bear and love is the one name of the Lord Jesus; all other names are secondary and divisive.

The ability to "speak the same thing" flows from this one name. We do not need to agree on every opinion, but we must hold fast to the common confession of Christ. This matches Paul's later testimony in Ephesians 4 — "one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (vv. 4–6). These "seven ones" form the divine reality of the church's oneness.

Paul's appeal, then, is simple yet profound: in the name of our one Lord Jesus Christ, speak the same thing, let there be no divisions, and be joined together in one mind and judgment. The basis of unity is not human agreement but the exalted name of Christ.

Teaching Inset: Perfectly Joined Together

Paul's call for the Corinthians to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" sounds lofty, but it rests on what they already have:

- Fellowship in Christ (v. 9).
- The one name of Christ (v. 10).

The phrase "perfectly joined together" (Greek katartismenos) means to be restored, mended, or set in order — like broken bones being set, or torn nets being repaired. Paul is not demanding uniformity of human opinion, but urging them to be restored into harmony in Christ.

True oneness is not human conformity but the shared life of Christ mending us back into one Body.

Teaching Inset: Paul's Trinitarian Ground of Oneness

When Paul pleads "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," he is not appealing to a mere title. He is grounding the church's oneness in the reality of the Triune God.

- **One Spirit** — gives life and forms the one Body (Eph. 4:4).
- **One Lord** — the Son, in whom we believe and into whose name we are baptized (Eph. 4:5).
- **One God and Father** — the source, above all, through all, and in all (Eph. 4:6).

Paul echoes the same Trinitarian structure elsewhere:

- "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14).
- "Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit… differences of ministries, but the same Lord… diversities of activities, but the same God." (1 Cor. 12:4–6).

For Paul, the oneness of the church is not organizational but organically rooted in the Triune God:

- The Father is the source.
- The Son is the foundation and Lord.
- The Spirit is the life and the builder.

Thus, when Paul pleads for the Corinthians to "speak the same thing" and avoid divisions, he is not asking for human conformity but for a return to the living reality of the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father.

Verses 11–12

"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'"

Exposition:

Paul names the report: Chloe's people had informed him of quarrels. Factions had formed around personalities: Paul (the founder), Apollos (eloquent teacher), Cephas (Peter, respected apostle), and even Christ Himself (claimed in an exclusive, elitist way). Division is not solved by choosing the "right" party — even the Christ-party was divisive, because it claimed Christ for itself against others.

Teaching Inset: From Contentions to Divisions

- **In Corinth**: Paul was addressing contentions — seeds of division — but they were still one church in one city. He could write, "to the church of God which is in Corinth."
- **Today**: Those seeds have grown into full-blown divisions. Cities have multiple competing "churches," each with its own name, banner, and tradition. What Paul sought to prevent has become the norm.
- **The Irony**: Many of today's divided groups look down on Corinth as a failure. Yet Corinth, despite its immaturity, was closer to the New Testament ground of oneness than much of modern Christianity.

Paul's warning remains prophetic: if contentions are not nipped in the bud, they harden into divisions. What began as "I am of Paul… I am of Apollos" has multiplied into countless sects.

Verses 13–16

"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other."

Exposition:

Paul demolishes their party-claims with piercing questions. Christ is not divided. Paul was not crucified. Baptism was not into the name of Paul. By minimizing his role in baptizing, Paul prevents anyone from attaching undue importance to him. Even the act of baptism could be twisted into a banner for division, but Paul strips it of any use for factionalism.

Verse 17

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."

Exposition:

Paul clarifies his mission: to preach the gospel. Baptism is important, but secondary to the message of Christ crucified. He also rejects rhetorical cleverness — "wisdom of words" — lest the cross be emptied of its power. Human eloquence can overshadow the message; Paul insists the power lies in the cross itself.

Sidebar: Divisions Today

The Corinthians split over teachers and personalities. Today divisions are often around denominations, doctrines, or leaders. Paul's question still stands: "Is Christ divided?" To divide the Body of Christ is to deny in practice the oneness of the Lord.

Teaching Inset: The Basis of Oneness

- **Ground**: the local church in its city (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi). Not divided by leaders, doctrines, or preferences.
- **Foundation**: Christ alone. No apostle, no teacher, no baptism replaces Him.
- **Building**: Our work must be with eternal materials — Christ expressed in gold, silver, precious stones — not with natural things that cannot stand the test of fire.

Paul is not only rebuking party-spirit; he is laying a vision of the church: one church in one city, founded on Christ, built carefully for God's dwelling.

Sidebar: Christ the Entire Building

Christ is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), the walls (Rev. 21:12, 18), and the topstone (Zech. 4:7). From the bottom to the top, and in every direction, He is the structure of God's building. The New Jerusalem's glory is simply Christ expressed through His people.

Sidebar: Two Lines in the Church's Building

Paul's imagery in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 echoes the two lines that run through all of Scripture — the line of life and building versus the line of death and ruin.

- **Gold, Silver, Precious Stones** → The Line of Life and Building
  - **Gold**: the Father's divine life and nature.
  - **Silver**: the Son's redemption, bringing us into life.
  - **Precious Stones**: the Spirit's transforming work, making us living stones for God's house.
  - **These materials remain forever**. To build on Christ *with* Christ is to minister Him as life, redemption, and transformation.
- **Wood, Hay, Stubble** → The Line of Death and Ruin
  - **Wood**: natural human life, fallen and corruptible.
  - **Hay**: shallow, fleshly works without depth.
  - **Stubble**: outward religious forms with no reality of Christ.
  - **These are consumed by God's testing fire**, proving they cannot belong to His eternal house.

1 Corinthians 1:18–31 — Christ the Power, Wisdom, and Righteousness of God

Verse 18

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Exposition:

Paul divides humanity into two streams: the perishing and the being saved. To the natural mind, the cross is nonsense; but to faith, it is the channel of God's saving power. Salvation here is not a single past event but an ongoing process — "being saved."

Verse 19

"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'" (Isa. 29:14)

Exposition:

Isaiah foresaw God overturning human cleverness. The cross fulfills this — God did not improve human wisdom; He nullified it. The gospel exposes that the world's wisdom cannot save.

Verse 20

"Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

Exposition:

Paul calls out the supposed authorities:

- **The wise** — Greek philosophers.
- **The scribe** — Jewish teachers of the Law.
- **The debater of this age** — professional rhetoricians who thrived on public disputation.

All collapse at the cross.

Sidebar: Corinth and Greek Philosophy

Corinth was saturated with Greek culture. Sophists prided themselves on eloquence. Stoics and Epicureans shaped everyday thought. Public prestige was tied to clever speech. Against this backdrop, Paul refused to polish the gospel with "wisdom of words" — because the plain cross itself reveals the folly of man's wisdom.

Verse 21

"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

Exposition:

God ordained it so: the world cannot reach Him by its own wisdom. Instead, He chose what seems foolish — simple preaching — as His means of salvation. The gospel humbles human pride and glorifies God's initiative.

Verses 22–23

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness."

Exposition:

- **Jews want signs** — outward demonstrations of divine power.
- **Greeks want wisdom** — refined philosophy.

But Paul gives neither. He preaches Christ crucified: offensive to Jews (a cursed Messiah, Deut. 21:23) and absurd to Greeks (a defeated God).

Verse 24

"But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Exposition:

The called see differently. To them, the cross reveals Christ Himself as both God's wisdom and God's power. What offends the flesh becomes the very means of salvation to faith.

Verse 25

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Exposition:

The paradox climaxes here: what looks like God's foolishness is wiser than human brilliance, and what looks like His weakness is stronger than human strength. The cross embodies this divine reversal.

Teaching Inset: Christ vs. Human Demands

- **Jews demanded signs** → God gave a crucified Messiah.
- **Greeks sought wisdom** → God gave a shameful cross.
- **Both stumbled**, but the called saw Christ as God's wisdom and power.

The gospel does not cater to human demands; it overturns them by presenting Christ.

Sidebar: Christ Our Wisdom

Later Paul will say: "Christ became to us wisdom from God — righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Wisdom is not abstract speculation but a living Person. For the believer, wisdom is not "what I know" but "Whom I know."

Verse 26

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

Exposition:

Paul reminds them of their origins. The Corinthian believers were mostly ordinary — not elites, not philosophers, not aristocrats. God did not call many from the upper strata of society. Their very existence as a church testifies that God works outside the structures of human greatness.

Verses 27–28

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are."

Exposition:

- Foolish → shaming the wise.
- Weak → shaming the mighty.
- Base and despised → reducing to nothing the esteemed.
- Things that are not → nullifying the things that are.

This is not random — it is God's deliberate strategy to strip man of boasting and magnify His grace.

Verse 29

"That no flesh should glory in His presence."

Exposition:

Here is the purpose: all boasting in human wisdom, strength, or nobility must vanish before God. The cross does not leave space for human glory.

Verse 30

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Exposition:

Paul now shifts from what the Corinthians are not, to what Christ is. Their life in Christ is "of Him" — out from God, not self-made.

Christ Himself is wisdom from God. But Paul defines this wisdom in three saving aspects:

- **Righteousness** — our justification before God.
- **Sanctification** — our transformation in daily life.
- **Redemption** — our final deliverance and glorification.

This spans past, present, and future. Christ is everything.

Teaching Inset: Three Tenses of Salvation

- **Past** — I have been saved: from the penalty of sin (justification). "By grace you have been saved through faith." (Eph. 2:8)
- **Present** — I am being saved: from the power of sin (sanctification). "To us who are being saved [the cross] is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18)
- **Future** — I will be saved: from the presence of sin (redemption, glorification). "We eagerly wait for the redemption of our body." (Rom. 8:23)

Salvation is not a one-time moment but a progressive experience of Christ Himself — past, present, and future.

Verse 31

"That, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'" (Jer. 9:24)

Exposition:

Paul closes with Scripture: all boasting is excluded except in the Lord. The Corinthians' factions were boasting in men; Paul redirects all glory to Christ alone.

Teaching Inset: Christ, Our Everything

- Christ is our power (v. 24).
- Christ is our wisdom (v. 24, 30).
- Christ is our righteousness (justification, past).
- Christ is our sanctification (transformation, present).
- Christ is our redemption (glorification, future).

The Corinthians wanted eloquence, signs, and human leaders. Paul redirects them: all of God's salvation is wrapped up in one Person — Christ. To boast in anything else is to miss God's way.

Teaching Inset: Christ, the Centrality and Universality of the One New Man

- **Christ is the center** — the focal point, the foundation, and the cornerstone.
- **Christ is the circumference** — the universality, filling all things and embracing every part.
- **He is the beginning** (righteousness), **the middle** (sanctification), **and the end** (redemption).
- In the church today, and consummately in the New Jerusalem, Christ is the centrality and universality of God's eternal purpose.

1 Corinthians 2:1–16 — God's Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1–5 — Paul's Ministry in Weakness and the Spirit's Power

Verse 1

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God."

Exposition:

Paul reminds them of his first visit (Acts 18). Unlike the philosophers and orators of Corinth, he did not rely on rhetorical polish or clever systems of wisdom. Instead, he proclaimed the testimony of God — the plain gospel of Christ crucified and risen.

Sidebar: Contrast with Corinthian Culture

Corinth loved polished oratory. The Sophists prided themselves on clever arguments and philosophical systems. Paul consciously refused to compete on their turf. He knew that if the church were won by rhetoric, it would stand only as long as the rhetoric impressed. Instead, he gave them the "foolishness" of the cross — which cuts deeper than words.

Verse 2

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Exposition:

This was Paul's conscious choice. He narrowed his entire message to Christ crucified. Not speculation, not philosophy, not even miracles — just Christ, and Christ on the cross. This doesn't mean Paul preached nothing else (Acts shows he reasoned from Scripture), but that everything was centered on this one reality.

Teaching Inset: Paul's Determination

- "I determined" — Paul made a deliberate resolution, not a casual choice.
- He had the skill to argue with brilliance (as in Athens, Acts 17).
- But in Corinth, he deliberately narrowed his focus: Christ crucified as the center.
- Nothing else was allowed to compete with the cross.

Verse 3

"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling."

Exposition:

Paul confesses his posture. Corinth was an intimidating city — intellectually proud, morally corrupt. Paul did not arrive with human confidence but in human weakness. His trembling was not cowardice but a sober dependence on God, aware that his own strength was insufficient.

Sidebar: Weakness as God's Way

Paul's weakness opened the way for God's power. Later he will write, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Human weakness is not disqualification but God's method — so that the power is clearly His.

Verse 4

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Exposition:

Paul contrasts human persuasion with divine demonstration. His preaching was not about winning arguments but about letting the Spirit manifest power — convicting, regenerating, and transforming. This made the message living and irresistible, not just intellectually compelling.

Sidebar: Demonstration of the Spirit

Paul did not stage shows of miracles. The Spirit's demonstration was that Christ crucified became real to people: consciences pierced, lives transformed, idolaters turning to God. This was power in changed lives.

Verse 5

"That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Exposition:

Here is Paul's goal: faith rooted not in the shifting brilliance of men, but in the unshakable power of God. If the Corinthians' faith depended on eloquence, it would crumble when a more eloquent speaker appeared. But rooted in God's power, their faith would endure.

Teaching Inset: Why Paul Preached in Weakness

- To strip away human boasting.
- To highlight Christ crucified as the center.
- To open the way for the Spirit's demonstration.
- To ground faith in God's power, not man's wisdom.

Teaching Inset: Words vs. Spirit in Ministry

- Paul contrasts persuasive words of wisdom with the Spirit's power (vv. 1, 4, 13).
- Human eloquence can stir emotions or win arguments, but it cannot give life.
- The Spirit's demonstration transforms lives and plants faith in God.
- True ministry is not about how polished the words are, but whether the Spirit is speaking through them.

1 Corinthians 2:6–16 — God's Hidden Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit

Verse 6

"However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."

Exposition:

Paul is not against wisdom itself. He distinguishes between human wisdom of this age — which is temporary and fading — and God's wisdom — eternal and revealed to the mature. The rulers of this age, whether political or intellectual, are destined for nothingness.

Verse 7

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory."

Exposition:

God's wisdom is not discovered by speculation; it is revealed. It was hidden in God's heart, planned before time, destined for our glory. The mystery here is Christ Himself as God's wisdom (1:24, 30), now unveiled through the gospel.

Teaching Inset: Hidden Wisdom, Ordained for Our Glory

- God's wisdom was hidden before the ages, but it was planned for our glory.
- Salvation is not only forgiveness but glorification — being brought into Christ's own glory.
- Romans 8:30 — "whom He justified, these He also glorified."
- 2 Thess. 2:14 — "for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- God's eternal purpose is not just to save us from sin, but to bring us into His glory.

Verse 8

"Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

Exposition:

The crucifixion exposes the blindness of human rulers. In killing Jesus, they condemned themselves. They crucified not just a man, but "the Lord of glory." Human wisdom is shown to be folly when it rejects God's revealed wisdom in Christ.

Verse 9

"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'" (Isa. 64:4)

Exposition:

God's wisdom cannot be grasped by natural senses (sight, hearing, imagination). It must be revealed by God Himself. His prepared things are beyond human discovery but destined for those who love Him.

Verse 10

"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."

Exposition:

What human senses cannot grasp, the Spirit reveals. The Spirit knows God's depths and communicates them to us. Revelation replaces speculation. Without the Spirit, even Scripture remains closed.

Verses 11–12

"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

Exposition:

Paul uses a simple analogy: only a person's own spirit knows their inner thoughts. Likewise, only God's Spirit knows His depths. And — wonder of wonders — believers have received this Spirit! By Him we come to know all that God has freely given us in Christ.

Teaching Inset: Three Spirits in 1 Corinthians 2

- **Spirit of man** — the organ to know ourselves and to contact God (Prov. 20:27).
- **Spirit of God** — the revealer of God's depths, indwelling our spirit (Rom. 8:16).
- **Spirit of the world** — the atmosphere of fallen humanity, opposing God's wisdom.

When the Spirit of God enters the spirit of man, we are freed from the spirit of the world and enabled to know Christ.

Sidebar: The Spirit of the World and the Spirit of the Air

- Paul contrasts two realms: the spirit of the world (1 Cor. 2:12) and the Spirit who is from God.
- In Ephesians 2:2 Paul identifies the source behind the world's atmosphere: the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

- This does not mean Satan is omnipresent; only God is everywhere. Satan is a creature but spreads influence through a hierarchy of fallen spirits (Eph. 6:12).
- His “spirit” operates in unbelievers by influencing and energizing through the world’s systems, culture, and desires — not by personal indwelling.
- Believers have received the Spirit of God, who indwells their human spirit and frees them from that old atmosphere.

Verse 13

"These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

Exposition:

Paul’s teaching is Spirit-taught, not man-made. Spiritual truths require spiritual words, matched and explained by the Spirit Himself. Only the Spirit can interpret and convey God’s wisdom accurately

Verse 14

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Exposition:

The “natural man” (Greek psychikos, soulish) cannot grasp spiritual realities. Human intellect alone cannot penetrate God’s things. Without the Spirit, they seem foolish. Only by spiritual discernment do we know Christ.

Sidebar: Experiencing Spiritual Discernment

- To the natural mind, Scripture may appear foolish or closed.
- When we turn to our spirit, the Spirit of God shines and makes the word living.
- The Bible is not merely studied with the mind; it is opened by the Spirit.
- Two people can read the same verse: one sees nothing, the other touches life.

Teaching Inset: Three Kinds of Man in 1 Corinthians

- **Natural (psychikos)** — soulish, without the Spirit; cannot receive spiritual things (2:14).
- **Fleshly (sarkikos)** — having the Spirit but living as though without Him; marked by strife and division (3:1–4).
- **Spiritual (pneumatikos)** — under the Spirit’s rule, discerning all things, sharing the mind of Christ (2:15–16).

Paul’s flow is deliberate: from natural, to fleshly, to spiritual. The Corinthians’ contentions showed they were not “natural” (unsaved), but fleshly believers walking like men.

Verse 15

"But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one."

Exposition:

The spiritual person, enlightened by the Spirit, can discern all things. But the natural man cannot discern him, because spiritual realities are hidden to the soulish mind. This doesn't mean arrogance, but recognition of the Spirit's higher perception.

Verse 16

"For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (Isa. 40:13)

Exposition:

Paul closes with triumph: the mind of the Lord is beyond man's instruction, yet astonishingly, believers have the mind of Christ. This is not individual genius, but the corporate mind of Christ shared in the Spirit.

Teaching Inset: The Corporate Mind of Christ

- Paul says, "we have the mind of Christ" — not "I."
- This mind is possessed corporately by the Body, not individually in isolation.
- Discernment and wisdom come in fellowship, not private brilliance.
- This prepares the way for Paul's teaching on the Body in chapter 12 and echoes Ephesians 4:23 — "be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Teaching Inset: The Spirit's Role in Revelation

- The Spirit searches the depths of God (v. 10).
- The Spirit makes known what God freely gives (v. 12).
- The Spirit teaches in spiritual words (v. 13).
- The Spirit grants discernment (vv. 14–15).
- The Spirit shares with us the very mind of Christ (v. 16).

All wisdom, glory, and understanding come by the Spirit, not by natural effort.

Sidebar: Christ, the Hidden Wisdom of God

Paul calls Christ "the wisdom of God" (1:24, 30). Here he unfolds that this wisdom was hidden, ordained before the ages, and revealed by the Spirit. Christ is God's secret plan, now openly declared: the crucified and risen Lord of glory, imparted to us by the Spirit as our life and understanding.

Teaching Inset: From Contentions to Divisions

- **Natural man (2:14)**: cannot receive the things of God at all.
- **Fleshly man (3:1–4)**: has the Spirit but lives as though without Him; proved by envy, strife, and contentions.
- **Spiritual man (2:15–16)**: under the Spirit's rule, discerning all things, sharing the mind of Christ.

In Corinth, contentions ("I am of Paul, I am of Apollos") were enough for Paul to call them fleshly. Yet they still remained one local church in one city.

Today, those same seeds have matured into full-blown divisions — denominations, sects, and countless separate groups with different names and structures. If

contentions were proof of fleshliness, how much more are the entrenched divisions of our day?

Christ is not divided. His Body is one. The same cross that Paul preached as God's wisdom and power is still the only cure for fleshly contentions and institutional divisions alike.

1 Corinthians 3 — God's Field, God's Building, God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:1–4 — Fleshliness and Divisions

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (vv. 1–4, NKJV)

Exposition:

Paul exposes their condition: they are not "natural" (unsaved), but neither are they truly "spiritual." They are fleshly believers — having the Spirit but walking as though without Him. Their immaturity is revealed by their contentions and party spirit. "Babes in Christ" is not an insult but a recognition that growth takes time. Yet the tragedy is that they had not advanced beyond infancy. Milk was appropriate at first, but they should have matured into solid food. Instead, envy, strife, and divisions marked their fellowship.

Sidebar: Contentions vs. Divisions

- In chapter 1 Paul addressed contentions: "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos."
- Here he names them "divisions" (schismata). Contentions tolerated will always ripen into divisions.
- For Paul, even these contentions were proof of fleshliness. How much more are today's entrenched denominational divisions proof of the same?

1 Corinthians 3:5–11 — The One Foundation: Christ

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." (vv. 5–9)

Exposition:

Paul lowers himself and Apollos from celebrity status to the role of mere servants. Ministers are channels, not sources. Each has a task — planting, watering — but God alone gives life and growth. This perspective destroys boasting in men. Here Paul begins to say what the church in Corinth truly is: not a dumpster fire of problems, but God's field and God's building. As God's field, they are organic — full of life, destined for increase. As God's building, they are purposeful — designed for God's dwelling. Ministers are fellow workers with God, not competitors, and the church belongs to God, not to men.

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (vv. 10–11)

Exposition:

Paul, as a wise master builder, laid the only true foundation: Jesus Christ Himself. The foundation is not Paul, Apollos, Peter, or any teaching — it is Christ. On this foundation, others build, but all must take heed. A good start does not guarantee a good structure. The foundation is once for all, unchanging. Christ is the bedrock of the church, just as He is the rock in Matthew 16:18. Ministers must examine not only what they build, but how.

Sidebar: The Ground and the Foundation

- The ground of the church is its locality — one church in one city.
- The foundation of the church is Christ alone.
- The two safeguard the church's oneness and purity. If the ground is wrong (divisions), or the foundation is wrong (something other than Christ), the building cannot be according to God's plan.

Typology Inset: Christ and the Church as God's Building

- **Tabernacle (Exodus 26)**: Foundation — silver sockets: Christ's redemption. Boards — believers standing upright. Coverings — Christ's humanity, sacrifice, and divine protection.
- **Temple (1 Kings 6)**: Foundation — costly stones: Christ the immovable base. Walls — overlaid with gold: Christ's divine nature expressed. Roof — cedar beams: Christ as riches and covering.
- **Church (1 Cor. 3)**: Foundation — Christ alone. Walls — believers joined corporately. Roof / topstone — Christ as the crowning capstone of God's dwelling.

1 Corinthians 3:12–17 — Building Materials and God's Temple

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw…" (v. 12)

Exposition:

The foundation is Christ, but the materials vary. Gold, silver, precious stones signify Christ wrought into believers: divine nature, redemptive value, transformed character — the line of life and building. Wood, hay, straw signify human effort, worldly wisdom, fleshly work — the line of death and ruin.

"Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (vv. 13–15)

Exposition:

The judgment is not of salvation but of service. The Day of Christ will reveal the quality of our work. Reward or loss depends not on results as man sees, but on whether we built with Christ Himself or with our own efforts. A believer may be saved, yet his work destroyed.

Sidebar: Reward and the Millennial Kingdom

- **Not salvation**: The foundation (Christ) is secure. Salvation is by grace, not by works (Eph. 2:8–9).
- **The issue is service**: What we build upon Christ will be tested by fire.
- **The reward**: reigning with Christ in His kingdom (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4; Matt. 25).
- **The loss**: saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15) — secure in Christ but missing the reward of the kingdom age.

Meaning: The "reward" Paul speaks of is not heaven vs. hell, but the privilege of reigning with Christ in the coming millennial kingdom. Faithfulness in building today determines participation in glory then.

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (vv. 16–17)

Exposition:

Paul now lifts the vision: not only are they God's field and building, but God's temple. The church is sacred because the Spirit dwells there. This is corporate — the whole church in Corinth is God's temple. To damage or divide it is to desecrate God's dwelling, inviting His judgment.

Sidebar: The Line of Life and the Line of Death

- **Life and building** → gold, silver, precious stones: Christ worked into believers.
- **Death and ruin** → wood, hay, straw: natural, fleshly, unenduring.
- Only Christ's substance can withstand the fire of God's judgment.

Sidebar: The Temple of God — Corporate vs. Individual

- **Chapter 3 (vv. 16–17)**: You are God's temple. "You" plural — corporate, the local church together as God's dwelling.
- **Chapter 6 (v. 19)**: Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. "You" singular — individual believers.
- **Distinction**: Chapter 3 → corporate temple. Chapter 6 → individual temple.

Inset: The Shekinah Glory and the Temple

- **Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–35)**: The cloud covered the tabernacle, and the glory of the LORD filled it — even Moses could not enter.
- **Temple (1 Kings 8:10–11)**: The cloud filled the house of the LORD so the priests could not minister.
- **Church (1 Cor. 3:16–17)**: You are God's temple. The same God who filled the tabernacle and temple now indwells the church.

Meaning: The shekinah glory that filled the house in the Old Testament now finds its New Testament fulfillment in the Spirit's indwelling presence. The church is holy because God Himself dwells there.

1 Corinthians 3:18–23 — No Boasting in Men, All Things in Christ

1 Corinthians 3:18–20 — The Folly of Worldly Wisdom

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" (vv. 18–20)

***Exposition*:**

Paul exposes the danger of self-deception. The Corinthians, steeped in a culture that exalted philosophy and eloquence, were tempted to measure themselves by the world's standards. But true wisdom begins by renouncing worldly wisdom. To embrace the cross is to appear foolish to this age, yet it is the only way to become truly wise.

Quoting Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11, Paul demonstrates that God overturns human cleverness and exposes the emptiness of man's most profound thoughts. What Corinth prized — intellectual skill, clever speech, philosophical speculation — God declares to be futile.

Sidebar: Becoming a Fool to Be Wise

- To "become a fool" is to accept the reproach of the cross.
- Worldly wisdom exalts self; God's wisdom humbles man.
- The measure of wisdom is not culture or intellect, but Christ crucified.

Inset: God's Verdict on Human Thought

- Job 5:13: "He catches the wise in their own craftiness."
- Psalm 94:11: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."
- God not only sees man's schemes, He declares them empty when divorced from His purpose.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23 — No Boasting in Men, All Things in Christ

"Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (vv. 21–23)

Exposition:

Having shown the futility of worldly wisdom, Paul applies it directly: stop boasting in human leaders. The Corinthians had divided into parties around Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. But these men were not masters; they were servants given to the church. Far from being limited to one leader or one stream, the Corinthians already possessed everything in Christ.

Paul expands the scope: even the great realities of existence — life, death, time, and eternity — are under Christ's lordship for the church's benefit. Nothing is outside of God's purpose for His people. The section ends with the divine order: the church belongs to Christ, and

Christ is God's. In this arrangement, all boasting in men is silenced, and glory returns to God alone.

Sidebar: All Things Are Yours

- **Apostles**: gifts to the church, not masters of it.
- **The world**: under God's sovereignty, serving His plan.
- **Life and death**: even death is "yours," conquered in Christ.
- **Things present and to come**: time itself belongs to the believer.

Inset: The Divine Order Restored

- You are Christ's.
- Christ is God's.
- The church finds its identity in Christ, and Christ Himself is of God.
- This order secures unity and glorifies God's eternal purpose.

1 Corinthians 4 — Apostolic Stewardship and Fatherhood

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 — Servants of Christ and Stewards of Mysteries

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." (vv. 1–5)

Exposition:

Paul redefines the role of apostles and ministers. They are not celebrities or masters, but servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Their task is not to gain popularity or satisfy human judgments but to faithfully dispense Christ and the truths of God's purpose.

Paul stresses that human evaluation means little. Even his own self-examination does not justify him. The true Judge is the Lord, who will expose hidden motives and reveal the counsels of the heart at His coming. Final praise belongs to God alone, not to men.

Sidebar: Servants and Stewards

- **Servants of Christ**: under Christ's authority, not their own.
- **Stewards of mysteries**: entrusted with God's revelation.
- **Faithfulness required**: success is not measured by results but by loyalty to Christ.

Inset: True Judgment Belongs to the Lord

- Human judgment is shallow and premature.
- Even self-judgment is unreliable.
- The Lord will expose motives at His coming.
- True praise and vindication come only from God.

1 Corinthians 4:6–13 — The Apostles' Humility and Suffering

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now." (vv. 6–13)

Exposition:

Paul confronts the Corinthians' arrogance with irony. They were puffed up, acting as though they were already rich and reigning. But everything they had was received — so why boast?

By contrast, the apostles were not reigning but suffering. Instead of honor, they were treated as spectacles, fools, and outcasts. They endured hunger, poverty, persecution, and labor. Yet in suffering they displayed the Spirit of Christ: blessing when reviled, enduring when persecuted, entreating when slandered. The Corinthians sought glory; the apostles bore the cross.

Sidebar: The Corinthians vs. the Apostles

- **Corinthians**: proud, self-sufficient, "already reigning."
- **Apostles**: humbled, suffering, "men condemned to death."
- **Danger**: seeking status while neglecting the cross.

Inset: Marks of Apostolic Life

- **Spectacle to the world**: lives on display before men and angels.
- **Fools for Christ**: despised for the gospel.
- **Weak, dishonored**: the opposite of worldly greatness.
- **Reviled, persecuted, defamed**: yet responding with blessing, endurance, and entreaty.
- **The filth of the world**: apostles bore the shame of the cross, not the honor of men.

1 Corinthians 4:14–21 — Paul's Fatherly Admonition

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the

power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (vv. 14–21)

Exposition:

Paul shifts from stern rebuke to tender fatherhood. His words are not to shame but to warn, spoken as to beloved children. Unlike many instructors (paidagogoi — guardians or tutors), Paul was their spiritual father, for he had begotten them in Christ through the gospel. Fathers impart life and identity, not just lessons. In every age there are many teachers but few fathers.

He urges them to imitate him, not in mannerisms but in his way of life in Christ — the way of the cross, humility, and service. To reinforce this, he sent Timothy, his faithful son in the Lord, to remind them of his "ways in Christ," which he taught consistently everywhere in every church. This safeguarded the oneness of the Body. **Unlike modern Christianity, fractured by many teachings and traditions, the apostles taught one Christ, one way, one testimony across all the churches.**

Paul then warns the arrogant: he will come, if the Lord wills, and will test not their words but their power. For the kingdom of God is not in eloquence but in reality. It is not about winning arguments, but about Christ expressed in life. The Corinthians had a choice: Paul could come with a rod of discipline, or with love and gentleness. His goal was always restoration, but he would not shrink from exercising authority if needed.

Sidebar: Instructors vs. Fathers

- **Instructors (tutors)**: many in number, external, rule-based.
- **Fathers in Christ**: few, but they beget through the gospel, nurture, and bear responsibility.
- **Paul's ministry was paternal and life-imparting**, not professional or contractual.
- **Modern application**: Christianity abounds in teachers, but where are the fathers?

Inset: Teaching Everywhere in Every Church

- **Paul's teaching was consistent** — one Christ, one cross, one way.
- **No regional "versions" of Christianity**.
- **Safeguard for unity**: the same teaching preserved the one testimony.
- **Contrast**: denominational divisions today fracture the Body's expression.

Inset: The Kingdom in Power, Not in Word

- Corinth prized eloquence; Paul pointed to reality.
- Power is not noise or rhetoric, but Christ lived out.
- Evidence of power: sinners saved, believers transformed, churches built up.
- The kingdom is God's life expressed, not human boasting

Inset: Paul's Two Ways of Coming

- Rod: discipline if rebellion continued.
- Love and gentleness: if correction was received.
- Either way: his motive was restoration and God's building.

Chapters 5–7 — Purity, Marriage, and Living unto God

1 Corinthians 5 — Purity and Discipline in the Church

1 Corinthians 5:1–5 — Discipline in the Church

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (vv. 1–5)

***Exposition*:**

Paul confronts a scandal within the church — a man living in sexual immorality with his stepmother, a sin even pagans would condemn. The church was proud when they should have been mourning. Instead of tolerating the sin, they were to remove the offender from their midst.

Paul, though absent, declares his judgment: the man must be delivered to Satan, meaning put outside the fellowship of the church. This discipline was severe but not vindictive. The goal was that through suffering in the flesh he might repent, and his spirit be saved in the day of the Lord.

Sidebar: The Seriousness of Tolerated Sin

- A sin "not even named among the Gentiles" polluted the church.
- Pride in tolerance showed blindness to God's holiness.
- Mourning and discipline should have been their response.

Inset: The Purpose of Discipline

- Remove the evil from among the saints.
- Act corporately in the name of Christ.
- Deliver to Satan = exclusion from church fellowship.
- Goal: ultimate salvation and restoration.

1 Corinthians 5:6–8 — Christ Our Passover

"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (vv. 6–8)

***Exposition*:**

Paul warns that tolerated sin spreads like leaven through dough. The church cannot boast in tolerance while corruption grows unchecked. Believers are called to purge out the leaven — sin and corruption — because in Christ they are already unleavened.

Paul links this to the Passover. Just as Israel cleansed their houses of leaven before the feast, the church must cleanse itself from sin. Christ, the true Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

Therefore, the Christian life is pictured as an ongoing feast — one kept not with malice and wickedness, but with sincerity and truth.

Sidebar: The Danger of Leaven

• Sin spreads if tolerated.
• Pride in tolerance blinds to reality.
• The whole church is endangered by one hidden leaven.

Inset: Christ Our Passover

• Christ is the Lamb sacrificed for us.
• His blood covers from judgment.
• The church must live as unleavened.
• Our feast: sincerity and truth, not corruption.

1 Corinthians 5:9–13 — Purity in the Church

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person." (vv. 9–13)

Exposition:

Paul clarifies a misunderstanding from his earlier letter. Christians are not called to avoid all contact with unbelievers — otherwise they would have to leave the world. The command applies to those within the church who persist in sin while claiming to be brothers. Such a one must not even be received at the table, because fellowship implies approval.

The church's task is not to judge outsiders; God Himself will do that. The church's responsibility is to judge inside its own fellowship, maintaining purity and protecting Christ's testimony. The command closes with a solemn charge: "Put away from yourselves the evil person."

Sidebar: Clarification of Separation

• Not: avoiding sinners in the world.
• Yes: separating from a brother who persists in sin.
• Fellowship cannot coexist with unrepentant immorality.

Inset: Judgment Inside, Not Outside

• The church judges those inside.
• God judges those outside.
• Purity in the house of God safeguards His testimony.

1 Corinthians 6:1–6 — Lawsuits Among Believers

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking one another to secular courts. The saints, who will one day judge the world and even angels, are surely qualified to resolve disputes within the church. To bring a brother before unbelievers damages relationships and publicly exposes

the weaknesses of the church, dishonoring the Lord's testimony.

Paul asks one of the most searching questions in this letter: "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" (v. 7). In other words, it is better to suffer personal loss than to injure the oneness of the church. Preserving the testimony of Christ and the unity of the local church is more valuable than winning a case or clearing one's name in public court.

Paul's Appeal for Oneness

"Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" — 1 Corinthians 6:7

"But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." — Matthew 5:39–40

"So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." — Romans 14:19

Meaning: Paul (and Jesus before him) calls believers to choose oneness over vindication, peace over retaliation, and the building up of the church over personal rights. This is not weakness but spiritual victory — a testimony that Christ is our righteousness and Judge.

1 Corinthians 6:7–11 — Washed, Sanctified, Justified

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the radical change that has taken place in them through Christ and the Spirit. His three words — washed, sanctified, justified — describe completed, once-for-all realities that continue to have effect, yet they also point to ongoing subjective experiences we must enter into daily.

• **Washed** (ἀπελούσασθε – apelousasthe): **Aorist middle voice — a decisive, once-for-all cleansing personally applied to the believer.**
– **Objective**: Cleansed from all guilt and defilement by Christ's blood (Titus 3:5).
– **Subjective**: Ongoing washing of the conscience and spirit by the Spirit and the Word whenever we confess (Eph. 5:26; 1 John 1:9).

• **Sanctified** (ἡγιάσθητε – hēgiasthēte): **Aorist passive voice — God Himself acted to set you apart.**
– **Objective**: Positionally separated from the world and transferred into God's possession (Acts 26:18).
– **Subjective**: Progressively transformed as the Spirit works Christ's holy nature into you (1 Thess. 5:23).

• **Justified** (ἐδικαιώθητε – edikaiōthēte): **Aorist passive voice — God's legal verdict over you in Christ.**
– **Objective**: Declared righteous once for all based on Christ's work (Rom. 5:1).
– **Subjective**: Enjoyed afresh as we stand in grace and live by faith (Rom. 5:2).

Calling on the Lord and the Triple Work: Paul says this happened "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." These are not merely doctrines to affirm — they are realities to experience. Calling "O Lord Jesus!" brings a fresh application of His blood (washing), renews our consecration (sanctifying), and reassures our standing before God (justifying).

1 Corinthians 6:12–17 — The Body for the Lord and Union with Christ

Christian liberty is real, but union governs liberty. The body belongs to the Lord, and the Lord is for the body; resurrection dignifies the body as a future temple. Because our bodies are members of Christ, sexual sin is not merely a moral lapse but a violation of our union with Him. Paul climaxes with v. 17: our spirit is joined to the Lord Spirit — the deepest spiritual union revealed in the New Testament.

📦 Greek Word Study: ὁ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ ἓν πνεῦμά ἐστιν — "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit."

Sidebar: One Spirit with the Lord

- **Believers are joined to the Lord in their spirit** — a living, experiential union.
- **This union is the power for holiness** — not willpower, but shared life.
- **Christian liberty is governed by this union**: "I will not be brought under the power of any."
- **The body is sanctified because the spirit is joined to the Lord** — holiness flows from the inside out.
- **Practice**: Call "O Lord Jesus!" to stir up this one-spirit reality and walk in resurrection life.

1 Corinthians 6:18–20 — Your Body Is a Temple

In Chapter 3, Paul revealed that the church in Corinth was the temple of God — not a denomination, sect, or one of many so-called churches in a city. He warned that anyone who destroys or corrupts this temple will face God's judgment (3:17). Now Paul brings the matter home: each believer's body is also a temple. The corporate temple is made of many personal temples. To defile one member's body is to bring dishonor to the whole building; to keep one's body holy strengthens the testimony of the entire church as God's dwelling place in that city.

Sidebar: The Two Temples — Corporate and Personal

- **Chapter 3**: **The church is the temple** — one church in one city.
- **Chapter 6**: **Each believer's body is a temple** — the Spirit's dwelling place.
- Personal holiness builds up the corporate testimony of the church.

Key Takeaway

Paul's solution is not legalism but vision. The church is God's house; the believers are His dwelling place. Seeing this leads to:

- **No lawsuits among believers** — disputes handled within the family of God.
- **No immorality** — bodies kept for the Lord's glory.
- **Calling on the Lord** — the key to living in the reality of being washed, sanctified, justified, and joined to Him as one spirit.

Reminder from Chapter 1: Paul opened this letter by addressing the believers as those who "call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:2). **This was no casual greeting** — it was a divine key for the whole letter:

- **Calling preserves the corporate temple** — guarding from divisions.
- **Calling preserves the personal temple** — filling our spirit with life.
- **Calling preserves relationships** — softening our hearts, avoiding lawsuits.
- **Calling preserves the testimony** — supplying grace to live before the world.

Sidebar: Calling — Corporate and Personal
- **Corporate**: Acts 2:21 — believers called on the Lord together.
- **Personal**: Romans 10:12–13 — calling is for daily salvation and supply.
- **Application**: Calling is both a group practice and a personal lifeline.

Final Note to the Reader

As long as you are alive, there is still time to repent, be cleansed, and avoid judgment — both for defiling the corporate temple and for defiling the personal temple. Meet in the proper way — as the church in the locality where you live, keeping the oneness of the Body and refusing sectarian divisions. Flee fornication, confess sins, and be cleansed (1 John 1:9).

Suggested Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that I have been washed, sanctified, and justified in Your name and by Your Spirit. Keep me in the experience of Your cleansing and renewing day by day. Strengthen me to flee every form of sin and glorify You in my body and spirit. Build me together with other believers in my city as Your temple, that You may have a dwelling place and a testimony on the earth. O Lord Jesus, I call on Your name — keep me joined to You as one spirit today.

Forward Look

In Chapter 7, Paul will turn from lawsuits and temple purity to address marriage, singleness, and holiness in relationships, showing how God's calling sanctifies not just our bodies but our homes and family life.

1 Corinthians Chapter 7 — Marriage, Singleness, and Devotion to the Lord

Paul now turns to questions the Corinthians had written to him, moving from lawsuits and church discipline to personal relationships, marriage, singleness, and practical living in light of "the present distress." This chapter is pastoral, balancing freedom and responsibility, urging believers to live wholly unto the Lord regardless of marital status or earthly condition.

1 Corinthians 7:1–9 — Marriage and Singleness

Exposition: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." (vv. 1–2) Paul affirms that singleness can be good — even preferable — for those able to receive it, yet marriage is God's appointed safeguard against immorality.

- "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her..." (v. 3) Marriage is a partnership of mutual giving.
- "The wife does not have authority over her own body..." (v. 4) Mutual authority over each other's bodies expresses oneness.
- "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time..." (v. 5) Temporary abstinence is for prayer, not prolonged separation.
- "For I wish that all men were even as I myself... each one has his own gift from God." (v. 7) Singleness and marriage are both gifts of grace.

1 Corinthians 7:10–16 — Divorce and Mixed Marriages

Exposition: "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband... and a husband is not to divorce his wife." (vv. 10–11) Paul repeats the Lord's command that marriage among believers should be permanent. If separation occurs, reconciliation is the goal.

Exposition: "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe... let him not divorce her." (vv. 12–14) The believer sanctifies the marriage, setting apart the home for God's work.

Exposition: "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace." (v. 15) Paul counsels believers not to be enslaved to maintain a union that the unbeliever refuses.

1 Corinthians 7:17–24 — Abiding in One's Calling

Exposition: "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk." (v. 17) Paul exhorts believers to remain in the condition in which they were called.

- "Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised..." (v. 18) What matters is keeping God's commandments.
- "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." (v. 23) Christ owns us — our calling is dignified regardless of status.

1 Corinthians 7:25–38 — Counsel Concerning Virgins and Betrothed

Exposition: "Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy." (v. 25) Paul's advice is Spirit-led and pastoral.

- "I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress..." (v. 26) Hardship makes simplicity of life advantageous.
- "But even if you do marry, you have not sinned..." (v. 28) Paul warns of added pressures.
- "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord..." (vv. 32–33) Singleness allows undistracted devotion.

1 Corinthians 7:39–40 — Widows and Remarriage

Exposition: "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." (v. 39) Paul

permits remarriage, but only to another believer. “But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment — and I think I also have the Spirit of God.” (v. 40)

Sidebar: Living in Light of the Present Distress

- The “present distress” likely refers to persecution or famine making normal life difficult.
- Paul’s advice is pastoral, not legalistic — his concern is to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord (v. 35).
- “The time is short… For the form of this world is passing away.” (vv. 29, 31)

Key Takeaway

- Marriage and singleness are both honorable gifts from God.
- Remain in the calling in which you were called.
- Live with eternity in view — Christ must have the first place.

Suggested Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that You have called me to Yourself. Whether in marriage, singleness, or widowhood, keep me wholly Yours. Make my heart undivided, my life devoted, and my body holy until You return.

Chapters 8–10 — Idols, the Lord’s Table, and God’s Glory

1 Corinthians Chapter 8 — Knowledge, Love, and the Conscience of the Weak

Paul now begins addressing the issue of food offered to idols, a question that had troubled many believers in Corinth. In that city pagan temples were everywhere, and much of the meat sold in the markets had first been offered in idol sacrifices. Some believers knew that idols were nothing and felt free to eat such meat. Others, recently converted from idolatry, still associated that food with their former worship and felt their conscience defiled.

Paul’s answer establishes a foundational principle for the entire Christian life: knowledge must be governed by love. Liberty is real, but liberty must always serve the building up of others.

1 Corinthians 8:1–3 — Knowledge Puffs Up, but Love Edifies

“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” (v. 1)

Exposition: The Corinthians prided themselves on knowledge. They understood that idols were not real gods and therefore concluded that eating idol meat was harmless. Their theology was correct, but their attitude was dangerous.

Paul warns that knowledge alone can inflate the ego. When truth becomes merely intellectual possession, it produces pride rather than maturity. Love, however, builds up others. The issue is therefore not simply what is correct, but what helps the church grow.

“And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” (v. 2)

Exposition: True spiritual knowledge produces humility. The more one truly knows God, the less one boasts in knowledge. Spiritual pride reveals that knowledge has not yet matured into wisdom.

"But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him." (v. 3)

Exposition: Paul shifts the focus from knowing to being known by God. The true mark of spirituality is not intellectual mastery but a living relationship with God expressed in love.

1 Corinthians 8:4–6 — The Reality Behind Idols

"Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." (v. 4)

Exposition: Paul affirms the theological truth: idols are powerless objects. They represent gods that do not exist. A mature believer understands that food itself cannot spiritually defile.

"For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth… yet for us there is one God, the Father… and one Lord Jesus Christ." (vv. 5–6)

Exposition: Paul contrasts pagan polytheism with the Christian confession. Believers recognize only one true God — the Father — and one Lord — Jesus Christ — through whom all things exist. The gospel restores clarity in a world filled with false worship.

Yet this theological clarity does not end the discussion. The problem lies not in the food but in the effect our actions may have on other believers.

1 Corinthians 8:7–8 — The Problem of the Weak Conscience

"However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." (v. 7)

Exposition: Many believers in Corinth had only recently come out of idol worship. To them, eating such meat still carried the memory of pagan devotion. If they ate it, their conscience felt violated.

Paul introduces the concept of a weak conscience — not morally weak, but still sensitive and undeveloped in understanding.

"But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." (v. 8)

Exposition: Food itself has no spiritual value. Christianity is not a system of dietary laws. Yet freedom in indifferent matters must still be governed by love.

1 Corinthians 8:9–12 — Liberty That Becomes a Stumbling Block

"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." (v. 9)

Exposition: Christian liberty can become dangerous when it harms another believer. A strong believer might exercise freedom without hesitation, but a weaker believer might imitate that action against his own conscience and thus stumble spiritually.

"For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?" (v. 10)

Exposition: The weaker believer may conclude that participation in idol feasts is acceptable and thus be drawn back toward his former life. What began as liberty for one becomes spiritual harm for another.

"And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (v. 11)

Exposition: Paul does not mean eternal destruction but spiritual ruin — the weakening of faith and conscience. The seriousness of the issue lies in the value of the person involved: Christ died for that brother.

"But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." (v. 12)

Exposition: To harm a fellow believer's conscience is to sin against Christ Himself. The Body of Christ is so closely united to its Head that injury to one member becomes offense to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 8:13 — The Principle of Love Above Liberty

"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (v. 13)

Exposition: Paul concludes with a striking declaration. He willingly renounces his liberty if it might harm another believer. This is the heart of Christian love — the voluntary limitation of freedom for the good of others.

This principle becomes the bridge to Chapter 9, where Paul presents his own life as the living example of surrendering personal rights for the sake of the gospel.

Sidebar: Liberty Governed by Love

Christian liberty is real, but it is never absolute. The believer is free from legalistic rules, yet bound by the higher law of love. The mature Christian asks not merely, "Am I free to do this?" but rather, "Will this help or harm my brother?"

The measure of spiritual maturity is therefore not the extent of liberty exercised but the willingness to lay down liberty for the sake of others

Sidebar: The Conscience in Christian Living

The conscience functions as the inner witness of right and wrong. When newly converted believers come out of sinful environments, their conscience may remain sensitive in certain areas. Spiritual growth gradually brings clarity, but forcing a believer to act against conscience damages faith.

Paul therefore instructs stronger believers to walk carefully so that the weaker may grow without injury.

Key Takeaway

- Knowledge alone can produce pride, but love builds up the church.
- Idols are nothing, but the conscience of a weaker believer must be protected.
- Christian liberty must always be governed by love.
- The mature believer is willing to limit personal freedom for the spiritual good of others.

Suggested Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for freeing me from sin and from empty religion. Teach me to walk not only in truth but in love. Guard me from pride in knowledge, and make my liberty a means of building others up. Give me a heart that gladly lays down its rights so that my brothers and sisters may grow safely in You.

1 Corinthians Chapter 9 — Apostolic Rights and the Way of the Cross

Paul now shows how the principles of Chapter 8 — knowledge governed by love — apply to his own ministry. He defends his rights as an apostle, then demonstrates the way of the cross by voluntarily laying those rights down for the sake of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:1–14 — Paul's Apostolic Rights

"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" (v. 1)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul begins with rhetorical questions to affirm his apostleship. The Corinthians themselves were his seal — proof that his apostleship was genuine.

He reminds them of his right to receive support:

- "Do we have no right to eat and drink?" (v. 4)
- "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles…?" (v. 5)
- "Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?" (v. 7)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul appeals to both nature and Scripture: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." (v. 9) The principle is clear — those who sow spiritual things should reap material things (v. 11).

1 Corinthians 9:15–23 — Paul's Voluntary Surrender of Rights

"But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me…" (v. 15)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul's glory is that he preaches the gospel free of charge. His reward is not payment but the privilege of offering the gospel without hindrance.

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (v. 16)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul adapts himself to every audience: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews… to those who are without law, as without law… I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (vv. 20–22) This is not compromise but love — a willingness to limit personal liberty to gain others for Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 — Running to Obtain the Prize

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” (v. 24)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul likens the Christian life to an athletic contest. Just as runners exercise discipline for a perishable crown, believers must live with self-control for an imperishable one.

“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (vv. 26–27)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul is not speaking of losing salvation but of being disqualified from the prize — the reward of reigning with Christ in the millennial kingdom.

Sidebar: Apostolic Pattern of Self-Denial

Paul’s life sets the pattern for all believers: Christian liberty is not for self-indulgence but for the sake of others. The way of the cross means laying down even legitimate rights so that Christ’s gospel may advance freely.

Key Takeaway

- Paul models laying down rights for the sake of the gospel.
- The Christian life is like a race — requiring discipline, focus, and self-control.
- The goal is not merely to run, but to win the prize of the kingdom reward.

Suggested Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for saving me and placing me in the race. Teach me to gladly lay down my rights for the sake of others. Strengthen me to run with discipline, keeping my eyes on You and pressing toward the prize of sharing in Your kingdom joy.

1 Corinthians Chapter 10 — Warnings from Israel and Fleeing Idolatry

Paul turns from personal testimony (ch. 9) to a doctrinal warning. The Corinthians had liberty, but liberty without self-discipline leads to disaster. Privilege is not protection. Israel was redeemed from Egypt, baptized into Moses, fed by heavenly food, and drank living water — yet most perished in the wilderness. Paul writes to call the church back to sobriety, faith, and single-hearted loyalty to Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:1–5 — Spiritual Privilege Without Spiritual Reality

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud... and that Rock was Christ.” (vv. 1–4)

> ***Exposition:*** Paul teaches typology: the cloud represents God’s presence and covering, the sea pictures salvation through judgment (baptism), the manna signifies Christ as bread of life, and the water from the rock portrays Christ as the Spirit who flows to satisfy. This shows that the Christ who was smitten is now the Spirit who supplies (John 7:37–39).

“But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” (v. 5)

Exposition: This is a warning: it is possible to partake outwardly of all these blessings yet still fall under God's judgment if there is unbelief and disobedience.

1 Corinthians 10:6–13 — Examples for Our Admonition

"Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." (v. 6)

Exposition: Israel's failures are divine warnings:

- **Idolatry** — feasting and play that led to worshiping other gods. (v. 7)
- **Immorality** — twenty-three thousand fell in one day. (v. 8)
- **Testing Christ** — rebellion brought serpents of judgment. (v. 9)
- **Murmuring** — complaining dishonored God's care and brought destruction. (v. 10)

"Now all these things happened to them as examples... on whom the ends of the ages have come." (v. 11)

Exposition: Paul reminds the church that we live in the climactic stage of God's economy — this is more serious, not less. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (v. 12)

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful... will also make the way of escape." (v. 13)

Exposition: Paul assures them that God always provides a way of escape — often Christ Himself — through calling on His name and walking by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 10:14–22 — The Lord's Table and the Table of Demons

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." (v. 14)

Exposition: Paul commands separation from idolatry. The Lord's Table is a real participation in Christ Himself: "The cup of blessing which we bless... the bread which we break..." (v. 16) To partake is to declare oneness with Christ and with His Body. To share in idol feasts is to have fellowship with demons. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons." (v. 21)

1 Corinthians 10:23–33 — Living for God's Glory

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify." (v. 23)

Exposition: Christian liberty must be guided by edification and the glory of God. Paul applies these principles:

- Eat freely in the market — the earth is the Lord's. (v. 26)
- Eat what is set before you at an unbeliever's table. (v. 27)
- Abstain if someone points out the food was offered to idols — for the sake of conscience. (vv. 28–29)

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (v. 31)

Exposition: This is the governing principle of Christian living — seek God's glory and the salvation of many.

Sidebar: Christ as the Spiritual Rock and Flowing Spirit

Paul's statement "the Rock was Christ" shows that the Christ who died is now the Spirit who indwells and supplies. The rock was smitten once (Exodus 17:6) — a type of the cross — after which the water flowed continuously. Today this water is the Spirit

flowing within us (John 7:39), culminating in the river of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1–2).

Sidebar: The Lord's Table as Covenant Continuation

The Lord's Table is the continuation of God's covenantal meal — from Passover to the New Covenant. It is a feast of remembrance, participation, and proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26). To partake is to separate from idols and live in fellowship with Christ and His Body.

Key Takeaway

- Spiritual privilege must lead to obedience — not presumption.
- Christ as the Rock is now the Spirit who supplies — we must drink of Him daily.
- The Lord's Table calls us to fellowship with Christ and holiness of life.
- Every decision should be governed by edification and the glory of God.

Suggested Prayer

Lord Jesus, keep me drinking of You as the Spirit and walking humbly in Your presence. Guard me from presumption, compromise, and idolatry. Make the Lord's Table a living reality — a feast of fellowship and separation unto You — and cause all my living to glorify You and build up Your Body.

Chapter 11 — Headship, the Lord's Supper, and Order in the Church

1 Corinthians 11:1–2 — Imitate Me, Honor the Traditions

Verses 1-2 (NKJV)

1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.
2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

Exposition

Paul begins with a Christ-centered exhortation: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." His life was not mere instruction but a living pattern, and he expected the Corinthians to take him as an example only because he was taking Christ as his own example.

Then comes a remarkable commendation: "Now I praise you…" — surprising, given all the problems in Corinth. Many Christians today think of the church in Corinth as a dumpster fire of problems that should be avoided. But Paul has a different view: he praises them for remembering him and for keeping the apostolic traditions he had delivered.

This shows that the Lord does not abandon His local churches because of weakness. Even with divisions, lawsuits, and moral failures, they were still His testimony in Corinth. Paul's goal was not to condemn them out of existence but to shepherd them into health.

And here is the sobering truth for us today: most Christians are in no position to mock or criticize Corinth. They do not meet as the church in the locality where they reside but gather in divided groups — denominations, independent fellowships, competing "ministries" — all claiming to represent Christ, yet denying the apostolic practice of one church in one city. Paul praises the Corinthians for keeping the apostolic traditions, while the majority of today's Christians have set those very traditions aside.

It also reminds us that not all "tradition" is to be rejected. Jesus condemned the traditions of men that nullify God's Word (Mark 7:8), but Paul commends the traditions of the apostles — the practices and teachings that embody God's revelation, such as the Lord's table, the preaching of the gospel, and the order of the church. To receive and keep these is not legalism but obedience to God's Word.

1 Corinthians 11:3–16 — The Principle of Headship and the Testimony of Covering

Verses 3–16 (NKJV)

3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.
4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.
5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.
6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.
7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.
8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.
9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.
10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.
11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.
12 For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.
13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?
15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.
16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Exposition

Paul begins with the divine order: God → Christ → man → woman (v. 3). This is not cultural but eternal, a loving arrangement God has established for His testimony on earth. Even Christ, though equal with God, takes God as His Head — our pattern of submission and headship.

He then applies this order to prayer and prophecy. The man, as the image and glory of God, should remain uncovered, displaying his direct relationship under Christ. The woman, as the glory of man, should cover her head, giving visible expression of her acknowledgment of headship. To disregard this covering, Paul says, is as shameful as being shorn (vv. 4–6).

The question naturally arises: is Paul referring only to a woman's natural hair? Verses 14–15 do say that long hair is given to her for a covering, but vv. 5–6 speak of a covering that

can be put on or taken off. This strongly suggests that Paul is referring to an additional, symbolic covering — likely a veil or cloth covering — as an outward testimony when praying or prophesying.

Paul grounds this teaching not in custom but in creation itself (vv. 7–9): man was made first, and woman was made from and for man as a counterpart. Yet he quickly balances this truth (vv. 11–12): in the Lord, man and woman are mutually dependent — man may have come first, but he now comes through woman, and all things are from God.

Paul also reveals a heavenly dimension: "because of the angels" (v. 10). The gathered church is on display before the angels (cf. Eph. 3:10). The head covering becomes a testimony in the spiritual realm that God's order is honored among His people

Paul concludes by appealing to their inward sense and to the universal practice of the churches (vv. 13–16):

• Nature itself maintains a distinction between male and female, and it is fitting that this distinction be visibly upheld in worship.
• The practice of head covering was not a Corinthian peculiarity but the shared custom of all the churches of God.

Paul's closing phrase is weighty: "nor do the churches of God" (v. 16). This is an ecclesiastical declaration, showing that this teaching was the universal practice of all the apostolic churches. It was meant to be a standard in every locality, not a matter open to debate or private interpretation. The "churches of God" do not refer to today's divided denominational situation, but to the one corporate testimony of God expressed locally in many cities.

Pastoral Application

Paul's teaching here was given to the church of God in Corinth, the one unique church in that city, and to all the local churches of his day. His instructions assume a context of oneness. Strictly speaking, they are not directed to today's divided denominational situation. But when believers meet as one church in one city, standing on the ground of the Body, they are rightly positioned to hear and practice this word. In such a setting, the head covering becomes a beautiful, corporate testimony of Christ's headship and God's government, visible before men, angels, and God Himself.

In the apostolic churches of the first century, it was common practice for women to have long hair and also to wear an additional covering when praying or prophesying — not under compulsion, but willingly, as a sign of honoring the Lord's divine order from the heart

Christ at the Center — The Lord's Table (11:17–34)

Paul corrects Corinth's abuses but also lifts their view of the Table.

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 — The Lord's Supper: Disorder, Instruction, and Hope

Quoted Text (NKJV): 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.
19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.
20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.
21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.
22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.
23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;
24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'
25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'
26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.
27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.
29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.
30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.
31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.
32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.
33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.
34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Exposition

Paul begins with a sobering statement: "I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse." Outwardly, they were still meeting as the church, but their gatherings had ceased to edify and had become occasions for judgment. This echoes the prophetic cry of Isaiah, where the Lord could no longer endure Israel's solemn assemblies when they were void of reality (Isa. 1:13–14).

He continues: "**when you come together as a church**" (v. 18**). This phrase is rich with meaning. Paul is not referring to a denominational meeting or a favorite fellowship among many. "As a church" means all the regenerated believers in Corinth coming together as the one practical expression of the Body of Christ in that city (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2). In the New Testament there is one church per city — the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the church of the Thessalonians. Paul's word assumes this unique ground of oneness.**

Paul then mentions divisions (schismata) and factions (haireseis). The divisions were visible splits, parties tearing at the oneness of the church (cf. 1:10–12). The factions were

groups separating themselves over teaching or preference. Paul is grieved that these existed, but he acknowledges a sobering truth: "there must also be factions" — not because they are good, but because God uses them. Factions act like a refining fire, exposing what is genuine: "that those who are approved may be recognized among you." The word "approved" (dokimoi) means tested and proven, like gold tried by fire. In times of division, the reality of who stands with the Lord and for the oneness of His Body becomes manifest. God uses even negative situations to make clear who stands with His testimony (cf. 1 John 2:19; 2 Tim. 2:20–21).

Then Paul adds another key phrase: "**when you come together in one place**" (v. 20). **This shows that the whole church in Corinth was gathering physically, corporately, in a single location to eat the Lord's Supper. This was not a scattered observance with many separate "tables" or "communions." The oneness of the church was visibly expressed by coming together in one place.**

Yet Paul laments that though they gathered as a church in one place, it was no longer truly to eat the Lord's Supper. Outwardly they went through the motions, but inwardly and spiritually, the reality was gone. Paul exposes the disorder: some were eating private meals ahead of others, some were drunk, and the poor were left shamed and hungry (vv. 20–22). This behavior despised the church of God and violated the very meaning of the table.

This also shows that **the Lord's Supper was not a token ritual but a full meal** — **the word deipnon literally means the main evening meal. The believers shared a real meal together, and within that meal they broke the bread and drank the cup in remembrance of the Lord. This explains why some could be hungry, others full, and some even drunk. The Supper was a corporate feast of fellowship, an expression of family life in Christ. Paul's solution was not to abolish the meal but to restore its spirit: wait for one another, care for one another, and partake in a way that honored the Lord's Body.**

To correct them, Paul takes them back to the words of the Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed (vv. 23–26):

- **The Bread**: "This is My body which is broken for you" — reminding us that the church is one loaf, one Body (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16–17).
- **The Cup**: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" — the covenantal basis of our fellowship with God, bringing forgiveness and access.
- **The Proclamation**: Every time the church partakes, it "proclaims the Lord's death till He comes," linking the cross (past) with the kingdom (future) and making the Supper a present enjoyment of Christ.

Paul then issues a solemn warning. In verse 27 he says that those who partake in an unworthy manner will be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." This is not about personal perfection — none of us could qualify if that were the requirement — but about the manner in which we partake. To be "guilty of the body and blood" is to treat the most sacred event in history — the death of Christ — as something common, even while outwardly proclaiming it. Just as those who crucified the Lord bore guilt for His blood, those who partake carelessly stand as though they disrespect the cross itself. Hebrews 10:29

warns of those who count the blood of the covenant a common thing — Paul's warning is similar. Thus, before partaking, believers should examine themselves (v. 28), confess sins, and be reconciled to others — not to frighten saints away from the table, but to call them to partake with reverence, gratitude, and faith.

Verse 29 continues: "**not discerning the Lord's body**." **This phrase is debated, but it likely includes both dimensions: Personal — failing to recognize the bread as representing Christ's body given on the cross; and Corporate — failing to see and honor the church as the Body of Christ gathered at the table. There is also a life dimension hinted at by the bread itself. The loaf is made of many grains — grains that had to be ground, mingled, and baked together. This recalls Jesus' word in John 12:24: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." Christ's death produced "many grains" — the many believers — and these grains are now one loaf, one Body. To fail to discern the Body is to miss this reality of life and oneness that His death accomplished.**

Paul then gives the sobering consequence in verse 30: "**For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep**." Weakness speaks of the loss of spiritual vitality — the church becomes dull and powerless when the table is mishandled. Sickness shows that the Lord was chastening some even physically to awaken them to the seriousness of their actions. Sleep is a gentle way of saying that some had died prematurely. This is not condemnation but severe mercy — a last resort of divine discipline.

Paul reassures them in vv. 31–32 that if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged. The Lord's discipline is corrective, sparing us from being "condemned with the world." Finally, Paul concludes with practical counsel (vv. 33–34): wait for one another, and if hunger is the issue, eat at home. The Lord's table is not about satisfying appetite but proclaiming Christ in oneness.

Pastoral Note

Paul's language about "coming together as a church" (v. 18), "coming together in one place" (v. 20), and "discerning the Body" (v. 29) is not casual. These phrases reveal the apostolic understanding of the church as the one corporate expression of Christ's Body in each locality, joined to the Head by life. They must be understood contextually, not through the lens of modern traditions that fragment the testimony of the Body.

Repeating this truth is not tedious but vital. In this age of religious tradition and degradation, we must hear it again and again until it governs our vision. As Paul said in Philippians 3:1, "For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe." To recover the Lord's table as the highest testimony of the church, we must recover the apostolic way: the whole church in a locality coming together as one to display the reality of the one Body and to discern what Christ's death has accomplished.

Pastoral Reflection

It is easy to read this passage and say, "How terrible those Corinthians were — our church would never act like that." But such a reaction misses Paul's burden. The tragedy today is not only that the Lord's table is often reduced to a token ritual with a crumb of bread and a sip of

juice, but also that the very divisions Paul condemned have become normalized.

In Corinth, Paul rebuked divisions as fleshly (1 Cor. 3:3) and warned that factions are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Yet today, denominationalism has become the accepted landscape of Christianity — multiple groups, each with their own table, each claiming to represent Christ. The result is a testimony fragmented before the world.

Paul's word calls us not to self-righteousness but to repentance and recovery:

• **Recovery of the corporate meal** — a love feast that expresses fellowship and oneness.
• **Recovery of the ground of oneness** — the church in each city as the local expression of the one Body.
• **Recovery of spiritual reality** — partaking in a way that truly discerns the Body and proclaims the Lord's death until He comes.

Rather than despising the Corinthians, we should let their failure and Paul's correction shine a light on our own practice and bring us back to the apostolic way.

Pastoral Application

The Lord's table is the highest corporate testimony of the church. It is where we remember Christ, participate in His death, and proclaim Him until He comes. It is not merely ritual but a living proclamation of Christ's finished work and our oneness in Him.

• To partake rightly is to honor both the Lord and His Body, bringing blessing and strengthening the church.
• To partake carelessly or divisively turns the meeting "for the worse" and may even bring the Lord's discipline.
• Self-examination and mutual consideration prepare the way for a joyful, edifying feast that glorifies Christ and foreshadows the marriage supper of the Lamb.

A Vision of a "For the Better" Gathering

What would it look like for the church to come together "for the better"? It would be a gathering where Christ is central and all the saints come with hearts full of gratitude. There would be no parties or cliques, no rich and poor separated, no one shamed and no one neglected. The bread would remind everyone that they are one loaf, one Body. The cup would renew their sense of covenant fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Their meal would be marked by joy, mutual care, and holy reverence. Instead of leaving divided or condemned, they would leave strengthened, encouraged, and built up, having truly proclaimed the Lord's death until He comes. Such a gathering becomes a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb — heaven's joy breaking into time.

The Church as the Body — Every Member Needed (Chapter 12)

Paul shows the church as an organism, not an organization.

Chapters 12–14 — Gifts, Function, and the Way of Love

1 Corinthians 12:1–3 — Concerning Spiritual Gifts

Text (NKJV):

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:
2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.
3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Exposition:

Paul begins a new section of the letter with "Now concerning…" — indicating he is addressing another of the Corinthians' written questions. The phrase "spiritual gifts" (Greek: pneumatikōn) literally means "spiritual things" or "spiritual matters." Paul is about to teach them about the whole sphere of the Spirit's working in the church.

He first takes them back to their past: "You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols…" The phrase "carried away" paints a picture of being swept along, led under compulsion by forces outside of themselves. The idols were "dumb" — mute, powerless, unable to speak or give life. Yet in that condition, the Corinthians were "led" — manipulated by a spiritual current they did not understand (cf. Eph. 2:2).

Paul then gives a foundational test: the Spirit of God will never produce speech that curses or denounces Jesus. Conversely, to truly confess "Jesus is Lord" is a miracle of the Spirit's work. This confession is not merely saying the words but surrendering from the heart to His lordship. It is the first mark of authentic spiritual experience.

Background Note — Pagan Corinth

Corinth was saturated with idol worship. The great Acrocorinth was crowned with the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, whose cult included hundreds of priestesses engaged in ritual prostitution. Shrines to Apollo, Poseidon, Hermes, and Asclepius lined the streets. Sacrifices, festivals, and temple feasts dominated social life, and the imperial cult required loyalty to Caesar as "lord."

Pagan worship often involved music, dancing, and frenzied cries — sometimes even curses or ecstatic shouts believed to be "inspired." Paul's readers knew what it felt like to be swept along by these powers. He reminds them that this is what they have been saved from. Now the Spirit does not produce frenzy but a clear, living confession of Christ as Lord.

Expanded Historical Background — Corinth's Religious and Moral Climate

Corinth was not merely religious but a city where idolatry, immorality, and commerce were interwoven:

- **Temples and Sacred Prostitution**: The Acrocorinth housed the temple of Aphrodite, whose priestesses served as sacred prostitutes. Worshipers believed union with them honored the goddess and secured her favor.
- **Brothels and Commercial Vice**: Alongside the temple prostitutes, Corinth had many

secular brothels, especially near the theater district. Archaeology reveals price inscriptions and erotic frescoes.
• **Why Both Existed**: Temple prostitution was ritual and tied to festival days; brothels made immorality available any time for anyone. Together they reveal a city culture that not only permitted but commodified sexual sin.
• **Civic and Social Expectations**: Nearly every guild meeting, public festival, and civic event involved sacrifices and idol feasts. Refusing to participate could mean business loss, strained family ties, or accusations of disloyalty.

Thus, Paul's reminder that they were once "carried away to dumb idols" was no light phrase — it pointed to a past life steeped in both spiritual darkness and moral corruption.

Sidebar — The Bible's View of Idols

The psalmists describe idols vividly:

"Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear…
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them." (Psalm 115:4–8; cf. Psalm 135:15–18)

Idols are lifeless — mute, blind, deaf — and those who worship them become like them: spiritually dull and unresponsive. Paul's phrase "dumb idols" carries this full weight: idol worship not only dishonors God but dehumanizes the worshiper. The Spirit reverses this condition — opening mouths to confess "Jesus is Lord" and making believers living, responsive members of Christ's Body.

Pastoral Sidebar — How to Discern the Spirit's Voice

Paul gives the Corinthians a simple but profound test for spiritual manifestations:
• **Does it honor Jesus?** The Spirit never speaks to curse Christ — His work always glorifies Him (John 16:14).
• **Does it confess His lordship?** True spirituality bows to Jesus, not to self or any other power.
• **Does it build up the church?** The Spirit's gifts are for "the profit of all" (v. 7), not for chaos or harm.

This principle remains vital today. Not everything "spiritual" is from the Holy Spirit. Whatever exalts Christ and leads believers into deeper fellowship with Him bears the mark of the Spirit's work.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 — Unity in Diversity

Text (NKJV):

4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.
6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

Exposition:

Paul highlights the beautiful unity-in-diversity of the church's spiritual life. These three verses form a Trinitarian pattern — Spirit, Lord, God — showing that all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in the church's functioning.

• **Diversities of gifts** — The Spirit distributes charismata (grace-gifts), spiritual abilities for the building up of the Body. No two believers receive the exact same measure — this ensures variety.
• **Differences of ministries** — The Lord Jesus appoints various forms of service (diakonia). The same gift may be expressed in multiple settings, but Christ is the one who directs the service and assigns the field of labor.
• **Diversities of activities** — The Father energizes (energemata) the actual operations that bring about spiritual results. It is His divine power that makes anything effectual.

Paul's point is that the Corinthians must not divide over spiritual gifts: everything they have flows from one Triune source. The Spirit equips, the Son directs, and the Father empowers — leaving no room for boasting or competition.

Expanded Insight — Why Paul Uses "Gifts, Ministries, Activities"

Paul could have simply said "God gives gifts," but he deliberately uses three terms and ties them to the Trinity for several reasons:

1. Safeguarding Unity in a Divided Church

The Corinthians were splintered over gifts, some priding themselves on certain abilities and others feeling inferior. Paul reminds them:

• Gifts are from the Spirit — not earned.
• Ministries are from the Lord — not self-appointed.
• Activities are from God the Father — not self-powered.

This strips away boasting and brings them back to humility and mutual honor.

2. Showing the Full Operation of the Triune God

Spiritual life is not chaotic but coordinated by the Godhead:

• Spirit — distributes the equipment.
• Lord — directs the service.
• Father — energizes the result.

The church is thus a living outflow of the Father, Son, and Spirit working together.

3. Preparing for the Body Metaphor

Soon Paul will speak of the church as Christ's Body. These three layers anticipate that picture:

• Gifts match members' capacities
• Ministries match members' functions
• Activities match members' operations
Every member is necessary, placed, and empowered by God Himself.

4. Correcting Corinthian Misuse of the Gifts

Corinth had overemphasized tongues and ecstatic displays. Paul widens their view, reminding them that spirituality is not just spectacular experiences but service and Spirit-energized fruitfulness for the good of all.

Background Note — Trinitarian Church Life

This passage is one of the clearest windows into how the Triune God operates in the church. The Spirit is not independent of the Son, and the Son is not independent of the Father. Their work is perfectly coordinated. Seeing this rescues the church from disorder and reminds believers that the goal is not self-expression but the coordinated expression of the Godhead.

Pastoral Sidebar — Keeping the Focus on God

• **Celebrate diversity** — God designed His church to be beautifully varied.
• **Honor the Head** — Jesus assigns where and how we serve.
• **Trust the power source** — It is God who works in us both to will and to do (Phil. 2:13).

When believers see the Triune God as the source of every gift, ministry, and result, pride dies, envy fades, and Christ Himself becomes the center of attention.

1 Corinthians 12:7–11 — The Manifestation of the Spirit

Text (NKJV):

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:
8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,
9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,
10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Exposition:

Paul now moves from the source of gifts (Spirit, Lord, God — vv. 4–6) to their manifestation (phanerōsis), showing how the Spirit makes Himself visible in the life of the church.

• **Verse 7**: **The manifestation is given "to each one" — meaning every believer has a portion of the Spirit's expression. No member is giftless.** Its purpose is corporate: "for the profit of all." Gifts are not for private enjoyment but for the building up of the Body.

• **Verses 8–10**: **Paul lists nine manifestations** — a representative list, not exhaustive:
• **Word of wisdom** — Spirit-given insight into God's will and purpose, enabling wise application of truth.
• **Word of knowledge** — Spirit-given grasp of divine facts or realities, revealing what is

otherwise hidden.
• **Faith** — a special surge of confidence to believe God for something beyond ordinary faith, often connected to miracles.
• **Gifts of healings** — plural in both words, suggesting multiple modes of healing for various conditions.
• **Working of miracles** — Spirit-empowered acts that transcend natural law, demonstrating God's power.
• **Prophecy** — inspired utterance that edifies, exhorts, and comforts (cf. 14:3).
• **Discerning of spirits** — ability to distinguish whether an influence is from the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, or demonic spirits.
• **Different kinds of tongues** — Spirit-enabled speech in languages not learned naturally, directed to God in praise or prayer.
• **Interpretation of tongues** — Spirit-given ability to render the meaning of tongues so that the church is edified.

• **Verse 11**: Paul closes with a key reminder: "One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." This highlights the Spirit's sovereignty. Gifts cannot be demanded, manufactured, or compared competitively — they are given according to His wise will.

Background Note — Pagan Ecstatic Utterances vs. True Tongues

The Corinthians were very familiar with ecstatic speech from their pagan past. In the cults of Dionysus, Cybele, and at the oracle of Delphi, worshipers or priestesses often cried out in frenzied, unintelligible sounds. These were considered "inspired" but were not real languages — more like ecstatic gibberish.

Paul's teaching distinguishes Spirit-given tongues from these pagan phenomena:

• Christian tongues have meaning, even if unknown to the speaker, and require interpretation so others may be edified (1 Cor. 14:5, 27–28).
• They are under the Spirit's control and should be exercised "decently and in order" (14:40), not in uncontrolled frenzy.
• Their aim is worship and prayer to God, not spectacle or self-display.

Pastoral Sidebar — Misuse of Tongues Today

Many modern Pentecostal and Charismatic gatherings repeat Corinth's error:
• **Public tongues with no interpretation** — directly contrary to Paul's command that if no interpreter is present, the speaker should keep silent (14:28).
• **Making tongues a test of spirituality** — some teach that tongues are the only evidence of Spirit baptism, ignoring Paul's rhetorical question: "Do all speak with tongues?" (12:30) — clearly expecting the answer "No."
• **Confusion instead of edification** — when everyone speaks at once, outsiders may think believers are "mad" (14:23), just as Paul warned.

Paul's corrective word is timeless: pursue love, seek gifts that build others up (especially prophecy), and let everything be done decently and in order. True spirituality is measured not by tongues but by whether Christ is exalted and His Body is edified.

Reflection — Corinth's Example and the Modern Church

Modern Christians often speak of Corinth as a "cesspool church," but Paul says they were "not lacking in any gift" (1:7). They manifested all nine of the Spirit's operations that Paul lists here — even if they needed correction in their use.

The greater tragedy today is not Corinth's excess but the modern church's deficiency:

• Many gatherings have no expectation of the Spirit's active manifestation.
• Some theologies teach that gifts are no longer for today — leaving churches with nothing but a sermon and a song.
• Far from being overly charismatic, many churches have become orderly but lifeless.

Paul's remedy was never to shut down the gifts but to restore them to their proper function: "Let all things be done for edification" (14:26) — not "let nothing be done."

Corinth shows us that a church can be messy and yet alive. The challenge today is to recover both the full functioning of the gifts and the love and order that keep them Christ-centered.

1 Corinthians 12:12–14 — The Body of Christ: One Yet Many

Text (NKJV):

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.
13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Exposition:

Paul now moves from the gifts of the Spirit to the life of the Body, the larger framework in which the gifts operate.

• **Verse 12**: He begins with the natural human body — one organism, many members, yet all working together as one. **Astonishingly, Paul says, "so also is Christ." He does not say "so also is the church," but identifies Christ and His Body together. The Head and the members form one corporate Christ (cf. Eph. 1:22–23).**

• **Verse 13**: The basis of this oneness is the baptism in the Spirit. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…" This is not a second experience reserved for a few — it is the initial act of the Spirit bringing every believer into Christ's Body at conversion (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27). Jew or Greek, slave or free — all distinctions are leveled at the cross and in the Spirit.

Paul adds, "and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." This points to the Spirit not only as the element into which we were baptized but also as the inward supply we continuously drink. The Spirit is both the uniting factor and the life flow — the "circulatory system" of the Body of Christ.

• **Verse 14**: He states the obvious but vital truth: the body is not a single member but many. Unity does not erase diversity. In fact, diversity is necessary for true Body-life.

Background Note — Spirit-Baptism and Early Church Life

In Corinth, believers came from radically different backgrounds — Jews with centuries of covenant tradition, Greeks steeped in philosophy, slaves with no social standing, and free citizens with wealth and education. In the Roman world, these groups were rarely equal. Yet Spirit-baptism created a new society where all were one in Christ

This verse was revolutionary in the first century — it envisioned a community where ethnic, social, and economic walls came down (cf. Eph. 2:14–16). The church was not just a new club but a new creation, displaying a unity unknown in the ancient world.

Pastoral Sidebar — One Body, Many Members

• **Christ and the Church are one**: To despise a member is to despise Christ Himself.
• **Spirit-baptism is universal**: Every believer shares in this reality, not just a select few.
• **Drink of the Spirit daily**: We were baptized once, but we must go on drinking of the Spirit to enjoy the supply of Christ's life.
• **Value diversity**: The Body is beautiful because of its many members functioning in harmony — no member can claim to be "the whole."

1 Corinthians 12:15–26 — Mutual Dependence of the Members

Text (NKJV):

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?
16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?
17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?
18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.
19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?
20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.
21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."
22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.
23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,
24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,
25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.
26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Exposition:

Paul applies the body analogy to correct two common errors in church life:

• **Verses 15–20 — The Error of Inferiority**: Some believers felt insignificant — like a "foot" wishing it were a "hand," or an "ear" wishing it were an "eye." Paul insists that such members are no less part of the body. God has arranged every member "just as He pleased" (v. 18). If everyone were the same, the body could not function. Diversity is God's design, not an accident.

• **Verses 21–24 — The Error of Superiority**: Others felt self-sufficient — like an "eye" saying to the "hand," "I have no need of you." Paul argues the opposite: the members that "seem to be weaker are necessary." Even the hidden parts of the body are vital. God has given "greater honor to that part which lacks it" — a radical inversion of worldly values.

• **Verses 25–26 — Mutual Care and Solidarity**: The goal is that "there should be no schism in the body." In a healthy body, pain in one member is felt by the whole; joy in one member is shared by the whole. This is Paul's vision of a church where each member's joy and suffering matter to everyone.

Background Note — Social Barriers in Corinth

Corinthian society was sharply divided:

• **Class Distinctions**: Wealthy patrons and poor slaves often worshiped in the same house churches (cf. 1 Cor. 11:21–22).
• **Honor-Shame Culture**: Public status was everything; those with low status were routinely overlooked.
• **Body Imagery in Roman Politics**: Roman writers used the "body" analogy to urge loyalty to the state — but usually to justify hierarchy, with the Senate as the "head" and the plebs as the "feet." Paul radically reinterprets the image: in Christ's Body, even the weakest parts are indispensable, and honor is redistributed to the lowly.

Pastoral Sidebar — How the Church Should Function

• **No inferiority complex**: Every believer has a God-given place — no one is "extra."
• **No superiority complex**: No one is self-sufficient — even the "hidden" ministries are essential.
• **Give honor where it is lacking**: Paul calls for special care for the overlooked, the quiet, the suffering, and the weak.
• **Practice solidarity**: Share one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and rejoice in one another's blessings.

Reflection — The Painful Gap Between Vision and Reality

For many believers, these verses describe something they have rarely — if ever — experienced in church life. Instead of mutual care, there is jealousy, envy, pride, and division. Instead of shared joy and sorrow, there is isolation. Instead of a living expression of the one Body in each locality, there is a man-made system:

• People file into a sanctuary, sit silently on pews, stand and sit on cue, sing a few

verses or repeat a chorus endlessly, then listen passively to a sermon — often disconnected from real life — and go home unchanged.
• The result is routine without relationship, form without fellowship, activity without true Body-life.

Paul's vision is far higher: a church where every member functions, every member is honored, and every member is cared for. His goal is not to shame the saints but to call them into the reality of Christ as their shared life. These verses stand as a mirror to our current practice and a call to return to the simplicity and vitality of the New Testament pattern.

1 Corinthians 12:27–31 — Application and Priority of Gifts

Text (NKJV):

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.
28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.
29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?
30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?
31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Exposition:

Paul now applies his teaching and brings chapter 12 to its climax.

• **Verse 27 — Identity and Function**: "Now you are the body of Christ…" This is not merely a metaphor — it is a statement of reality. The church in Corinth was the Body of Christ in that place, with each believer a vital member. Gifts are not abstract; they operate within the living Body.

• **Verse 28 — God's Appointments**: Paul lists a divine ordering of gifts: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues — with speaking and building gifts listed first because they most edify the church.

• **Verses 29–30 — Rhetorical Questions**: All expect the answer "No." Not all are apostles, prophets, teachers, or tongue-speakers. This refutes any teaching that a single gift must be present in every believer.

• **Verse 31 — The More Excellent Way**: Paul exhorts them to desire the greater gifts (those that edify the church most) but prepares them for chapter 13, where love is revealed as the atmosphere in which all gifts must operate.

Special Sidebar — The Church in Corinth: Farm, Building, Temple, Body

Paul has been building toward this moment since chapter 3:
• **God's Farm**: A place where life grows, watered and cultivated by apostolic workers (3:6–9).
• **God's Building**: A structure built on Christ as the foundation (3:9–15).

• **God's Temple**: The dwelling place of God's Spirit, holy and undivided (3:16–17).
• **Christ's Body**: The living organism through which Christ expresses Himself (12:27).

Most Christians think of their denomination or independent congregation as a "local body." Paul's vision is deeper: all the believers in a city together constitute the church in that city — the Body of Christ expressed there.

Special Sidebar — Apostles Then and Now

Paul lists apostles first because they are foundational in establishing the church's life and order.

• **Foundational Apostles**: The Twelve (plus Matthias and Paul) were unique — eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, commissioned directly by Him, and responsible for laying the doctrinal and practical foundation of the church. Their work is once-for-all and cannot be repeated (Eph. 2:20).

• **Continuing Apostolic Function**: Today there remains a need for apostolic workers who preach Christ in new places, plant and establish local churches according to the New Testament pattern, appoint elders, and restore churches to apostolic teaching when they drift. They do not write new Scripture but apply the original apostolic word.

Theological Sidebar — Paul's Completing Ministry

Paul understood his ministry as a "stewardship from God…to fulfill [complete] the word of God" (Col. 1:25). The Greek word plēroō means to bring to fullness. Paul's writings reveal the hidden mystery — Christ as Head and the church as His Body — thus completing God's revelation of His eternal purpose.

John's final writings brought the prophetic vision to its consummation, closing the canon. When John was told not to write what the seven thunders uttered (Rev. 10:4), it showed that God has given us all we need, even if not all He knows. Paul unveils the mystery; John unveils its consummation — together they complete the written word of God.

Pastoral Sidebar — Pursuing the Best Gifts

• **Desire with discernment**: Ask God for gifts that most build up others.
• **Affirm variety**: Do not pressure every believer to have the same gift — diversity is by God's design.
• **Keep love central**: Even the most powerful gifts are empty without love. Chapter 13 will show that love is the atmosphere in which the Body thrives.

Love Governing the Atmosphere — The More Excellent Way (Chapter 13)

Paul pauses to show that love is the atmosphere in which all gifts operate.

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 — Love, the Supreme Measure

Text (NKJV):

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,

and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Exposition:

Paul now shows "a more excellent way" — not as a replacement for spiritual gifts but as the atmosphere in which they must operate. Without love, gifts lose their purpose and even become dangerous.

• **Verse 1 — Tongues Without Love**: Even the most extraordinary speech — "tongues of men and angels" — is reduced to noise if love is absent. Corinth, fascinated with tongues, needed this sobering reminder: spirituality is not measured by sound but by love.

• **Verse 2 — Knowledge, Prophecy, and Faith Without Love**: Prophecy, insight into mysteries, and even mountain-moving faith are nothing without love. The greatest ministry gifts are empty if not motivated by Christlike care for others.

• **Verse 3 — Sacrifice Without Love: Even extreme acts** — giving away all possessions or martyrdom — can be loveless. Such deeds may win admiration, but before God they "profit nothing" if love is not the motive.

Paul is dismantling every Corinthian boast: tongues, knowledge, power, zeal — all are worthless apart from love.

Background Note — Pagan Corinth vs. Christian Love

In Corinth's culture, religious experiences could be ecstatic and spectacular, but they were often self-centered or aimed at gaining favor from the gods. Paul contrasts this with Christian love, which is self-giving, others-centered, and rooted in the very nature of God (cf. 1 John 4:8).

Pastoral Sidebar — Love as the Litmus Test

• **Love is greater than gifts**: The question is not "Do you have tongues?" but "Do you have love?"
• **Love purifies motive**: A gift exercised for self-display is noise; for the Body's edification, it is life-giving.
• **Love is sacrificial**: It moves beyond religious performance to genuine care for others.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 — The Portrait of Love

Text (NKJV):

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Exposition:

Paul now paints love not as an abstract idea but as a living reality — describing what love does and does not do.

• **Verse 4: Love suffers long and is kind** — Love is patient under provocation and actively kind in response. Love does not envy — it is glad for the blessing of others. Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up — it does not show off, promote itself, or live in pride.

• **Verse 5: Love does not behave rudely** — it is courteous and respectful. Love does not seek its own — it is not self-centered but seeks the good of others. Love is not provoked — it is not easily angered or irritated. Love thinks no evil — literally, it does not keep a record of wrongs but releases others from past offenses.

• **Verse 6: Love does not rejoice in iniquity** — it never delights in another's sin or downfall. It rejoices in the truth — it celebrates when truth prevails and when others walk in it.

• **Verse 7: Love bears all things** — covering and protecting rather than exposing. Believes all things — giving the benefit of the doubt, not living in suspicion. Hopes all things — expecting God's best for others. Endures all things — remaining steadfast even under trial.

Background Note — Love as Christ's Character

Every phrase in these verses describes the life of Jesus: patient with sinners, kind to the weak, humble, self-giving, pure, truthful, and enduring even to the cross. Paul is not describing mere human love but the divine love (agapē) poured into believers' hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

Pastoral Sidebar — Love as the Measure of Maturity

• **Love is practical**: This is not sentiment but action — patience, kindness, humility.
• **Love is costly**: It bears, believes, hopes, and endures — even when wronged.
• **Love is Christ formed in us**: These verses are a portrait of Jesus; they are also a call to let Him be expressed through us.

1 Corinthians 13:8–13 — The Permanence of Love

Text (NKJV):

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.
10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.
11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.
13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Exposition:

Paul shows that love is permanent whereas gifts are temporary and partial.

• **Verse 8 — Love Never Fails**: Unlike the gifts, which are temporary and partial, love endures forever. Prophecies will one day no longer be needed, tongues will cease, and partial knowledge will give way to full knowledge — but love remains into eternity.

• **Verses 9–10 — From Partial to Perfect**: The gifts provide partial revelation. "That which is perfect" points to the future completion of God's plan when we see Christ face to face (v. 12). In that day, the need for gifts will end, but love will still define eternity.

• **Verse 11 — Spiritual Maturity**: Paul likens the present use of gifts to childhood. Gifts are part of the church's growing-up process, but love is the mark of maturity.

• **Verse 12 — Seeing Face to Face**: In this age we see dimly, like a reflection in a bronze mirror, but a day is coming when we will see God clearly. Love prepares us for that day.

• **Verse 13 — Faith, Hope, Love**: These three abide, but faith will one day give way to sight, hope to fulfillment — only love remains forever.

Special Sidebar — Do the Gifts Continue Today?

Paul's words are often misunderstood to mean that spiritual gifts have ceased since the first century. But notice:

• **Future Tense**: Paul says prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, knowledge will vanish away — not that they have already ceased.
• **The Perfect Has Not Come**: Verse 10 links the end of the gifts to the time when we see Christ "face to face" (v. 12), pointing to Christ's return, not merely to the completion of the Bible.
• **The Present Age Still Needs Gifts**: Until Christ returns, the church still knows in part and prophesies in part. The church still needs prophecy, teaching, wisdom, healing, and other gifts to build up the Body (1 Cor. 14:26).

Paul's instruction is not to suppress the gifts but to exercise them in love and under biblical order: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thess. 5:19–20).

Background Note — The Corinthian Fascination with Gifts

The Corinthians overvalued tongues and other spectacular gifts, seeing them as the pinnacle of spirituality. Paul reminds them that these are temporary scaffolding, not the final structure. Love is the finished building — the eternal state of the church as the Bride of Christ in the New Jerusalem.

Pastoral Sidebar — The Eternal Priority of Love

• **Love outlasts gifts**: Gifts are for this age; love belongs to eternity.
• **Love is maturity**: Clinging to gifts while neglecting love is spiritual immaturity.
• **Love is preparation**: To learn to love now is to be ready to see Christ face to face.

Edifying Gatherings — Spirit-Led and Participatory (Chapter 14)

Paul gives the clearest NT picture of a church meeting.

1 Corinthians 14:1–5 — The Priority of Prophecy

Text (NKJV):

1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.
3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.
4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.
5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Exposition:

• **Verse 1 — Pursue Love, Desire Gifts**: Paul connects chapter 13 with chapter 14: love is the motive, but gifts are still to be desired. "Pursue" is a strong word — chase after love — and "desire earnestly" spiritual gifts. These are not opposed but complementary.
• **Verse 2 — Tongues to God**: Speaking in tongues is primarily vertical — to God, not to men. Without interpretation, it edifies the speaker but does not build up others.
• **Verse 3 — Prophecy to Men**: Prophecy, in contrast, is horizontal — it speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and comfort.
• **Verse 4 — Edification as the Standard**: Paul makes edification the measure: tongues edify the speaker; prophecy edifies the church.
• **Verse 5 — Paul's Desire**: Paul affirms tongues ("I wish you all spoke with tongues") but elevates prophecy as "greater" because it builds up the entire church.

Mini Sidebar — Love and Gifts: Not Either/Or but Both

Paul has just shown that gifts will one day pass away (13:8–10) and that love is the greatest and most enduring reality (13:13). Yet here he immediately commands: "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts." Love does not replace gifts — it regulates them. Gifts are still needed until "that which is perfect has come." Love is the motive; gifts are the instruments. The church needs both.

Background Note — Prophecy in the Early Church

In the New Testament, prophecy is not primarily foretelling future events (though it can include that) but forth-telling — speaking God's present word to His people. Prophecy was widespread, not restricted to a prophetic elite (cf. Acts 2:17–18; 1 Cor. 14:31: "you can all prophesy one by one").

Pastoral Sidebar — What Prophecy Really Is

True prophecy is not merely the public reading of the writings of a great teacher but the living overflow of Christ from within the believer. Colossians 3:16 describes this: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly… teaching and admonishing one another…" Prophecy is Christ, who fills you, being spoken forth through you.

Luke 1 gives us a living picture: when Gabriel greeted Mary, she was troubled but reassured by the angel. Later, Mary visited Elizabeth, and the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb at the presence of Christ. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a blessing. In response, Mary overflowed with praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord…" (Luke 1:46–55). This is prophecy in action — the Spirit, the Word, and the believer's spirit mingled together to magnify Christ and edify others.

Special Sidebar — Women and Prophecy in the Church

Paul's vision for prophecy includes women as well as men:

• **Women Do Pray and Prophesy**: 1 Corinthians 11:5 acknowledges that women pray and prophesy, with the instruction that they do so with head covering to honor God's headship order.
• **"You Can All Prophesy"**: 1 Corinthians 14:31 says "you can all prophesy one by one," which includes the women already mentioned in chapter 11.

• **Order, Not Silence**: When Paul later says women should be "silent" in the churches (14:34–35), he is addressing disruptive questioning, not forbidding Spirit-filled speaking. Women like Anna (Luke 2:36), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9), and Priscilla (Acts 18:26) show that God delights to use sisters to speak Christ. The key is honoring order and building up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:6–19 — Intelligibility and Edification in the Gathering

Text (NKJV):

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?
7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?
8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?
9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.
10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.
11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.
12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.
13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.
14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.
15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.
16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?
17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.
18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;

19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Exposition:

• **Verse 6 — Profit Through Clear Speech**: Paul asks what profit there is in tongues without understanding. Revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching profit because they build up others.
• **Verses 7–9 — Analogy of Instruments**: Even musical instruments must play distinct notes. Otherwise they are noise. Tongues without interpretation are sound without meaning.
• **Verses 10–11 — Languages Have Meaning**: Many languages exist, but without understanding speaker and hearer remain foreigners. Uninterpreted tongues create distance, not unity.
• **Verse 12 — Excel for Edification**: Their zeal for gifts should be directed toward what edifies the church.
• **Verse 13 — Pray to Interpret**: Those who speak in tongues should pray for interpretation so that all may benefit.
• **Verses 14–15 — Spirit and Understanding Together**: Paul values both spiritual prayer and understanding. Prayer and song should be intelligible so others may join
• **Verses 16–17 — The Corporate Amen**: Public prayers must be understandable so others can affirm them. Otherwise, even good thanksgiving fails to edify.
• **Verses 18–19 — Paul's Practice**: Paul values tongues highly but in the gathering prefers five intelligible words that teach others over ten thousand in a tongue.

Background Note — Corinthian Fascination with Tongues

In Corinth, tongues may have been prized for their mystery and spectacle. Paul re-centers the church on profit and edification — the goal is not private ecstasy but mutual building up.

Inset Box — Taking Off the "Church Building" Glasses

When modern readers see the phrase "in the church" (v. 19), they often picture:
• A formal church building with pews and pulpit
• A scheduled service with music, sermon, and announcements
• Coffee and donuts in the foyer

But this was not the first-century reality. The Corinthian believers met in homes, gathered around the Lord's Table, and participated actively: "Each of you has…" (1 Cor. 14:26) — psalm, teaching, revelation. "You can all prophesy one by one" (v. 31). The focus was not a building but Christ expressed through every member.

Paul's instruction is aimed at restoring this living, participatory expression of the Body of Christ. Five words of living understanding in such a setting are far more valuable than ten thousand words of unintelligible sound.

Pastoral Sidebar — Five Words vs. Ten Thousand

Paul's conclusion is striking: intelligibility trumps quantity. Five clear, Spirit-filled words that teach others are of more value than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. The measure is always: does this build up the church?

1 Corinthians 14:20–25 — Tongues as a Sign, Prophecy for Conviction

Text (NKJV):

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.
21 In the law it is written:
"With men of other tongues and other lips
I will speak to this people;
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,"
says the Lord.
22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.
23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.
25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Exposition:

• **Verse 20 — Grow Up in Understanding**: Paul exhorts the Corinthians to spiritual maturity — to be childlike only in malice, but adult in understanding. Their fascination with spectacle needed to be tempered by discernment and a focus on what builds up the church.

• **Verse 21 — Isaiah's Prophecy**: Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12, where God warned rebellious Israel that He would speak to them through foreign tongues — a sign of judgment, not blessing. Tongues, therefore, are a double-edged sign — they confirm God is speaking, but they also can highlight unbelief.

• **Verse 22 — Tongues as a Sign**: Paul clarifies that tongues are a sign for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is aimed primarily at believers, to edify, exhort, and comfort. This does not mean prophecy has no effect on outsiders — quite the opposite — but its purpose is to build the church.

• **Verse 23 — Disorder and Confusion**: Paul imagines the whole church coming together and everyone speaking in tongues simultaneously — the result would be confusion, and outsiders would think they were mad. His concern is for the church's testimony before the world.

• **Verses 24–25 — Prophecy's Evangelistic Power**: In contrast, prophecy can bring powerful conviction. The secrets of the visitor's heart are exposed, and he is brought to worship. The result is a powerful testimony: "God is truly among you."

Background Note — Tongues as a Sign of Judgment

In Isaiah's day, hearing foreign tongues was a sign that judgment and invasion were coming — a terrifying wake-up call. Paul uses this Old Testament background to show that uninterpreted tongues, far from being a mark of spirituality, can actually signify immaturity or even divine rebuke if they do not build up the church.

Pastoral Sidebar — The Evangelistic Power of Prophecy

Paul describes a church gathering so saturated with Christ that an outsider is struck to the heart, convicted, and brought to worship. This is not emotional manipulation but the Spirit using the living speaking of the saints to reveal Christ. The result is not confusion but awe — the unbeliever falls down and confesses that God is truly present. This is what our church gatherings should look like — not merely routine sermons but living encounters with Christ.

Special Sidebar — The Whole Church in One Place

Paul's phrase "if the whole church comes together in one place" is staggering. He envisions every believer in Corinth gathered as one. This shows:

• One Church in One City: Paul writes to "the church of God which is in Corinth" (1:2), not to churches, denominations, or sects. There was one church per city, expressed practically in oneness.

• How It Was Possible: Though Corinth was a large city, the number of believers may have been small enough to meet in a large home, courtyard, or hall. Even if they met in smaller groups at times, they still saw themselves as one church, not divided groups.

• Why Paul's Word Still Stands: Modern Christians often dismiss this as impractical today, citing the countless denominations, styles, and preferences ("many flavors of ice cream"). But Paul's word is not merely descriptive of Corinth — it is prescriptive of God's intention. God still desires one testimony of Christ per city.

• Challenge to Churchianity: Modern church life often revolves around buildings, programs, and man-made divisions. Paul's word calls us back to a radical oneness that seems 'too much' for today's mindset — yet this is precisely what Jesus prayed for in John 17: "that they all may be one… that the world may believe."

This vision confronts us: will we settle for division as normal, or will we seek to express the oneness of the Body of Christ in our locality? The goal is not to start another denomination but to drop our labels and gather as believers simply on the ground of Christ.

Reflection — Wrestling With Paul's Vision Today

Many readers today react by saying, "Well, that was then, this is now." They argue that such unity is unrealistic in a world with thousands of denominations. They even comfort themselves by saying it is good to have so many options — like choosing different flavors of ice cream — so everyone can have a church that suits their taste.

But Paul's word is not optional. It is God's revelation of how the church is to be expressed. The tragedy is that modern Christianity has normalized division and made oneness seem impossible. Yet the solution is not ecumenical compromise but a return to Christ as our center and ground of gathering. If believers in Corinth could come together as one church, so can believers today — if they will drop their sectarian names and gather simply as the church in their city.

1 Corinthians 14:26–40 — Order in the Gathering

Text (NKJV):

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.
28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God.
29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.
30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.
31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.
32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.
33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.
34 Let your women keep silent in the church, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.
35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in the church.
36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?
37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.
38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.
39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.
40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Translation Note — "In the Church"

In verses 28 and 35, Paul uses the phrase ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ (en tē ekklēsia), literally: "in the church." Some translations say "in church," which can sound like a reference to a building or a formal service. But Paul is speaking about the actual gathering of the believers as the church — the local expression of the Body of Christ in a given place.

This means:
• **Not a building** — the early church had no church buildings.
• **Not just any Christian meeting** — but the gathering of the saints as the church.
• **The weight of the definite article "the" ties this instruction to the corporate testimony of Christ.**

Paul's concern is not mere etiquette during a service but the expression of Christ's Body when it comes together.

Exposition:
• **Verse 26 — Each One Has**: Paul shows us the picture of a normal church gathering. Each one has a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation. This was not a one-man show but a meeting where every member functioned. The guiding principle is that all should be done for edification — building up the Body of Christ.

• **Verses 27–28 — Tongues in Order**: Paul limits tongue-speaking to two or three, one at a time, and insists on interpretation. If no interpreter is present, the speaker is to remain silent and commune quietly with God.

• **Verses 29–31 — Prophecy in Or**der: Two or three prophets speak, others weigh what is said. If revelation comes to another, the first yields. This allows everyone to participate and everyone to learn.

• **Verse 32 — Spirits Subject to Prophets**: Spiritual manifestations do not override self-control. True prophecy is never chaotic.

• **Verse 33 — God of Peace**: The goal of the meeting is peace and clarity, not confusion. God's nature is reflected when gatherings are marked by life and order.

• **Verses 34–35 — Women's Silence**: This is best understood as addressing disorderly questioning during the judging of prophecies. It does not contradict 11:5, where women pray and prophesy. Paul upholds headship and order, not total silence.

• **Verses 36–38 — Apostolic Authority**: Paul reminds them that what he writes is not advice but the Lord's command. Those who reject it show their ignorance.

• **Verses 39–40 — Final Summary**: Paul gives balance: earnestly desire to prophesy, do not forbid tongues, and let everything be done decently and in order.

Background Note — Participatory Meetings
Verse 26 is a window into early church life. Gatherings were open, participatory, and centered on Christ. Every member could bring something. This stands in contrast to the modern model where one man speaks and the rest are spectators. Paul's vision was for a living expression of the Body, not a weekly performance.

Pastoral Sidebar — Order Is Not Dead Formality

Paul does not call for lifeless ritual but for living order. True order allows the Spirit to move while preventing chaos. Many churches today have shut down participation in the name of 'order,' producing sterile meetings. Others swing to the opposite extreme, producing confusion. Paul's burden is that all things be done — not shut down — but done in an orderly way that builds up the church.

Special Sidebar — Women and Silence in the Churches (Expanded)

Paul's word in verses 34–35 has often been misused to silence women entirely, but this reading does not match the broader testimony of Scripture.

1. Women Were Active in the Early Church:
• Anna the prophetess openly spoke of the redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36–38).
• Philip's four daughters prophesied (Acts 21:9).
• Priscilla, along with Aquila, instructed Apollos more accurately in the way of God (Acts 18:26).
• Paul himself acknowledged that women prayed and prophesied in public gatherings (1 Cor. 11:5).

2. Paul's Concern Was Order, Not Suppression: In Corinth, some sisters were apparently speaking out of turn — perhaps asking disruptive questions during the weighing of prophecies (v. 29). Paul's remedy was not to silence women permanently but to restore order so that the meeting could flow properly and headship be honored.

3. Preserving God's Government and the Spirit's Freedom: Proper order does not eliminate sisters' functioning — it protects it. When gatherings are orderly and under headship, both brothers and sisters can exercise their portion in a way that builds up the Body.

Thus, Paul's word is not a blanket prohibition but a call for gatherings that reflect both divine order and the Spirit's freedom to use every member — including the sisters — for the edification of the church.

Reflection — Seeing the Church with Clarity

Paul ends with **'Let all things be done decently and in order**.' **Today, many churches emphasize 'in order' so heavily that nothing is done at all. They have turned this word into a pretext to shut down functioning and keep the laity silent. This misses Paul's point. The first part of the sentence is just as important: 'Let all things be done.' Paul envisions meetings full of Christ, full of functioning, full of speaking — yet all in a beautiful order.**

Modern Christians have difficulty seeing this because they have never experienced it. They see church life through the lens of denominational divisions and traditional services. Like the blind man in Mark 8, they see men like trees walking — a blurry vision of the church.

What is needed is a fresh touch from the Lord:
"Then again He laid His hands on his eyes and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly." (Mark 8:25)

This is a picture of what must happen to us. We need the Lord to touch our spiritual sight a second time — to remove the blur and show us the church as He sees it: not divided, not dead, but a living, local expression of His Body on earth.

Pastoral Exhortation:

"Lord, open my eyes to see Your church as You see it. Heal my spiritual sight. Deliver me from tradition, division, and passivity. Show me the glory of Your Body and teach me how to function in Your house."

When believers begin to pray this way, the Lord will answer — and He will gain a church that is full of life, order, and Christ's expression.

Closing Perspective — A Window into the First-Century Church

When we read 1 Corinthians 11–14, we are not merely collecting rules about headship, head coverings, spiritual gifts, or the proper way to take the Lord's Supper. **These chapters are a window into the ancient past, giving us a living picture of how a New Testament local church actually functioned.**

Through Paul's inspired words, we glimpse:

• The Lord's Table as a shared, participatory remembrance meal, not a ritual.
• **Every-member functioning**, where "**each one has**" — a psalm, a teaching, a revelation (14:26).
• **One-another living, where believers care for one another, exhort one another, and bear one another's burdens.**
• Real-time revelation, with prophecy, teaching, prayer, and singing interwoven.
• Corporate discernment, where words are weighed and tested, not passively consumed.
• Mutual care, so that when one member suffers, all suffer; when one rejoices, all rejoice (12:26)

The Local Nature of the Church

And we dare not overlook the local nature of the church Paul is addressing: "To the church of God which is at Corinth…" (1 Cor. 1:2). There were not many "churches" in Corinth — there was one church in one city, the local expression of the one Body of Christ. Paul's teaching rests on this reality: the practical oneness of all believers in a given locality, not the denominational fragmentation so common today.

Why This Matters Today — A Call to Recover the Vision

Corinth's pattern calls us back to Christ-centered, functioning, love-filled church life.

Call to Recovery

What Paul presents is not merely a record of history — it is God's divine pattern. The features of the church in Corinth — its local oneness, mutuality, and every-member participation — are not just for the first century; they are for us today.

The universal aspect of the church has been widely acknowledged, but the local aspect has largely been neglected, forgotten, or even dismissed. This must be recovered in practice so that the church in every city once again becomes the living, practical expression of the one Body of Christ on the earth.

• **Local**: The church must once again be expressed in each place as the gathering of all believers, not divided by name, denomination, or preference.
• **Mutual**: Church life is not a performance but a fellowship where every believer contributes and every believer is built up.
• **Living**: The meetings are not dead rituals but living encounters with Christ through the functioning of every member.
These chapters are God's invitation to return to this reality. To read them is to hear the Spirit calling: "Let all things be done… let all things be done for edification."

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for this glimpse into Your church in Corinth. Open our eyes to see Your church not as a problem to be avoided, but as God's farm, God's building, God's holy temple, and even Your very Body on the earth. Recover among us today the living reality of Your headship, the sweetness and proclamation of Your table until You come, the functioning of every member by Your Spirit, and gatherings that build up in love. Impress us with the weight and glory of this vision, and make us such an expression of You until You come again. Amen.

Chapter 15 — Christ's Resurrection and Ours

Verses 1–2 — The Gospel You Received and Stand In

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,
2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

Exposition:

Paul begins this chapter by reminding the Corinthians of the gospel he preached. Salvation is not just a past moment of decision but an ongoing reality — "you stand" in it, and "you are saved" by holding fast to it. Faith that does not persevere is vain and empty. This sets the tone: the resurrection is not a side doctrine but the very foundation of Christian faith.

Verses 3–4 — The Core of the Gospel

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

Exposition:

This is Paul's summary of the gospel in its purest form — four central facts: Christ died for our sins (atonement), He was buried (proving real death), He rose on the third day (resurrection life), and all this was in accordance with the Scriptures (God's eternal plan). This is not good advice but good news — an announcement of what God has done.

Teaching Inset: What Is the Gospel? Paul, the Kingdom, and Revelation

The word gospel comes from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion), meaning "good news" or "glad tidings." It was used for imperial announcements — the birth of a king, a great victory, a new era. Paul uses it to describe God's royal proclamation that Christ has defeated sin, death, and Satan.

Paul's Definition (vv. 3–4):

- Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
- He was buried — proof of His actual death.
- He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
- He appeared to many witnesses (vv. 5–8).

This is the heart of apostolic preaching — the kerygma — the saving announcement of God's redemptive act in Christ.

Gospel of the Kingdom:

Jesus came "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt 4:23), declaring that God's reign had broken into history through His person. This kingdom gospel continues until "the end of the age" (Matt 24:14).

Gospel in Revelation:

Revelation 14:6–7 shows an "everlasting gospel" proclaimed worldwide before final judgment, calling all to worship the Creator. Revelation 11:15 announces the consummation — "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."

Today's Distortions:

In every generation, the gospel is at risk of being redefined as moralism, therapeutic self-help, prosperity promises, ritual performance, activism, or mere decisionism. Paul insists the gospel is Christ crucified, buried, raised, and enthroned. It is news to be believed, not advice to be followed.

Proper Response:

The New Testament calls for:

- **Repentance**: turn from sin and idols (Mk 1:15; 1 Thess 1:9).
- **Faith**: receive the gospel personally (Rom 10:9–10).
- **Baptism**: confess Christ publicly as Lord and identify with His death and resurrection (Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3–4).

Teaching Note: The Gospel of Grace Today and the Everlasting Gospel in the Tribulation

Today we proclaim the gospel of grace — salvation offered freely through faith in Christ's finished work (Acts 20:24; Eph 2:8–9).

During the future tribulation, the everlasting gospel will be proclaimed by an angel worldwide (Rev 14:6–7), warning the nations to worship the Creator before final

judgment falls. The emphasis shifts from grace offered to judgment imminent — yet it is still "good news" that God's kingdom is about to appear.

Verses 5–11 — Eyewitness Testimony

5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.
6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.
7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.
8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.
9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.
11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Exposition:

Paul builds a cumulative case for the resurrection with multiple eyewitnesses: Peter, the Twelve, over five hundred believers (most still alive), James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself — the persecutor turned apostle. This is not myth or wishful thinking but public truth, confirmed by living testimony.

Paul then highlights the transforming grace of God: it forgave him, called him, and empowered him to labor "more abundantly" — yet he gives all credit to grace. The same grace that saved him was not passive but active, producing service for Christ.

Pastoral Reflection: Holding Fast to the Gospel

The gospel must be received, stood in, and held fast. Faith is not a one-time event but a persevering trust. Paul's reminder calls believers to treasure the gospel daily — to keep Christ's death, burial, and resurrection at the center of their life and witness.

Verses 12–28 — The Resurrection and Christ the Firstfruits

Verses 12–19 — If There Is No Resurrection

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?
13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.
14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.
15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.
16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.
17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!
18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Exposition:

Paul confronts the Corinthian denial of the resurrection head-on. He demonstrates the logical consequences step by step:

• If there is no resurrection, Christ Himself is not risen.
• If Christ is not risen, the apostolic message is empty and faith is futile.
• If faith is futile, sins remain unforgiven and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost forever.
• If hope in Christ is limited to this life only, believers are the most pitiable of all people.

This is one of the strongest affirmations in Scripture of the resurrection's central place in the gospel — without it, the faith of the believers would be empty and powerless.

Verses 20–28 — Christ the Firstfruits and the Consummation

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.
22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.
23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.
24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.
25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.
26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.
28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Exposition:

Paul shifts from hypothetical reasoning to a triumphant declaration: "But now Christ is risen."

• **Christ the firstfruits**: His resurrection is the guarantee that the full harvest of resurrection is coming.
• **Two humanities**: "In Adam all die" — Adam is the head of the fallen race; "in Christ all shall be made alive" — Christ is the head of the redeemed.
• **Order and timing**: Christ was raised first; those who are His will be raised at His coming.
• **Goal of history**: Christ reigns until every enemy is subdued — even death itself.
• **Climax**: Christ then delivers the kingdom to the Father so that God may be all in all — the final stage when God's purpose is fully realized.

Teaching Inset: Death During the Millennium vs. Death Abolished Forever

Isaiah 65:20 indicates that during the millennial kingdom, death still occurs: "the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed." Human lifespans will be greatly lengthened, but mortality is not yet abolished. Paul's phrase "the last enemy that will be destroyed is death" points beyond the millennium to the final judgment when death is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14) and then to the eternal state where "there shall be no more death" (Rev 21:4).

Teaching Inset: Inside and Outside the New Jerusalem

Revelation 21–22 depicts two spheres in the new earth: the New Jerusalem (the bride, the wife of the Lamb) and the nations walking in its light. All enjoy eternal life and resurrection glory, but nearness to the throne and participation in the city's administration reflect differing rewards and faithfulness

Teaching Inset: Restoration of David's Kingdom

Acts 1:6 shows the disciples asking Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus does not deny the restoration but defers the timing to the Father. Luke 1:32–33 promises that Christ will sit on David's throne and reign forever. The millennial reign is the fulfillment of this promise, inaugurating a kingdom of peace and righteousness that leads to the eternal state.

Teaching Inset: Future Temple and the Man of Lawlessness

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 reveals that a future temple will exist where the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) will seat himself and proclaim himself to be God. Ezekiel 40–48 gives a detailed vision of a millennial temple where worship will be conducted as a memorial of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

Teaching Inset: Who Reigns in Jerusalem

Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords from Jerusalem, but He shares His rule:
• David serves as prince under Christ (Ezek 37:24–25).
• The apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28).
• Glorified saints reign with Christ over the nations (Rev 20:4–6).
Jerusalem thus becomes the center of blessing and righteous government for the entire earth.

Pastoral Reflection: Hope Anchored in a Risen Christ

Because Christ is risen, faith is not in vain, sins are forgiven, those who have fallen asleep in Christ are not lost, and hope is secure. This hope strengthens believers to endure trials and gives them courage to live sacrificially, knowing that resurrection is the final word.

Verses 29–49 — Baptism for the Dead, Daily Dying, and the Resurrection Body

Verses 29–34 — Practical Implications of the Resurrection

29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?
30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?
31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.
32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"
33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."
34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

Exposition:

Paul argues that the Corinthians' own actions and Paul's own ministry make no sense without resurrection.

• **Baptism for the dead**: This mysterious phrase has several interpretations — vicarious baptism on behalf of those who have died, baptisms motivated by hope of reunion with departed believers, or baptism as a public declaration of faith in view of martyrdom. Whatever the meaning, it presupposes hope in resurrection.
• **Paul's constant danger**: He risked his life continually for the gospel — "I die daily." This means not only physical risk but also daily participation in Christ's death (2 Cor 4:10).
• **Fighting with beasts**: Whether literal or figurative, it shows intense opposition. Without resurrection hope, this would be pointless.
• **Ethical impact**: Denial of resurrection leads to hedonism. Paul calls them to wake up, live righteously, and know God.

Verses 35–41 — The Nature of the Resurrection Body

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"
36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.
37 And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain.
38 But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.
39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.
40 There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.
41 There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.

Exposition:

Paul answers the skeptic with analogies from nature:

• **Seed analogy**: The seed must die to bring forth new life. The resurrection body is continuous with but transformed from the body sown.
• **Diversity of creation**: Just as God gives different kinds of flesh and different glories to heavenly bodies, He can give us glorified bodies.
• **Hint of differing glories**: The mention of differing star glories may suggest differing measures of glory among believers in resurrection.

Verses 42–49 — From Adam to Christ, from Natural to Spiritual

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.
43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.
44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.
45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.
47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.
48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Exposition:

Paul describes the glory of resurrection transformation:

• **Four contrasts**: corruption→incorruption, dishonor→glory, weakness→power, natural→spiritual.
• **Adam and Christ**: Adam is the head of the natural race, Christ of the new creation. Believers will bear Christ's heavenly image.
• **This is God's goal**: to conform us to Christ's image (Phil 3:21; Rom 8:29).

Teaching Inset: The Last Adam Became a Life-Giving Spirit

Verse 45 declares that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. This means the resurrected Christ can now indwell believers, impart resurrection life, and transform them. This is not a denial of the Trinity but reveals the economic step of Christ becoming the Spirit to give life.

Doctrinal Reflection: The Two Becomings

Two great 'becomings' are revealed:
• John 1:14: The Word became flesh — God entered humanity.
• 1 Cor 15:45: The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit — the resurrected Christ now imparts life.
These steps show God's process in redemption. Seeing this requires revelation, not mere intellect.

Pastoral Reflection: The Hope of Bearing His Image

Believers live in hope that we will bear Christ's heavenly image. This hope purifies and strengthens us to endure suffering, knowing that the same Spirit who raised Jesus will give life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).

Verses 50–58 — The Mystery of Transformation and the Final Victory

Verses 50–53 — The Mystery Revealed

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.
51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—
52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Exposition:

Paul reveals a mystery — something previously hidden but now revealed. Flesh and blood as it is cannot inherit God's kingdom. A transformation must occur:
• Not all believers will die, but all will be changed.
• The change will be instantaneous — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.
• This will occur at the last trumpet, when the dead are raised and the living are transformed.

Teaching Inset: What Is the Last Trumpet?

This trumpet corresponds to the climactic call that signals resurrection and transformation (1 Thess 4:16). Some see it as the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15, others distinguish it as the last trumpet for the church before the tribulation judgments. In any case, it is the decisive call that ushers in glorification.

Verses 54–57 — Death Defeated

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:
"Death is swallowed up in victory."
55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"
56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.
57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exposition:

When the transformation is complete, death is swallowed up in victory, fulfilling Isaiah 25:8. Paul taunts death: "Where is your sting?" Sin is the sting that gives death its power, and the law strengthens sin by condemning. But God has given victory through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

Teaching Inset: The Sting of Death Is Sin

Sin gives death its poisonous power. Through Adam, sin entered and death through sin (Rom 5:12). Paul portrays sin as indwelling man's members (Rom 7:17). Christ bore sin, broke its power, and thus removed death's claim over the believer.

Verse 58 — The Practical Conclusion

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Exposition:

Paul ends with exhortation, not speculation:
• Be steadfast and immovable — stand firm in resurrection hope.
• Always abound in the work of the Lord — let the hope of resurrection fuel service.
• Labor is not in vain — resurrection guarantees that every act for Christ has eternal value.

Pastoral Reflection: Living in Resurrection Hope

Believers can face life, suffering, and even death with confidence. Resurrection means death is not the end and every sacrifice for Christ has eternal reward. This hope calls us to stability, courage, and joyful, overflowing labor for the Lord.

Chapter 16 — Practical Fellowship and Closing Exhortations

Verses 1–4 — The Collection for the Saints

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:
2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.
3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to

Jerusalem.
4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Exposition:

Paul begins with instructions about the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem — a major burden of his ministry (Rom 15:25–27; 2 Cor 8–9).

• Universal practice — the Galatian churches received the same instruction.
• First day of the week — an early reference to Christian gathering on Sunday.
• Regular giving — each believer sets aside something weekly as he may prosper.
• Preparedness — Paul wanted no last-minute collection when he came.
• Accountability — approved men would deliver the gift, showing integrity and transparency.

Verses 5–12 — Paul's Travel Plans, Timothy, and Apollos

5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).
6 And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.
7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.
8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.
9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.
10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.
11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.
12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

Exposition:

Paul shares his travel plans and heart toward the Corinthians:

• **Future visit planned** — he intends to come through Macedonia and possibly spend the winter with them, showing his desire for extended fellowship.
• **If the Lord permits** — Paul models submission to God's sovereignty over his plans (James 4:15).
• **Remaining in Ephesus** — he stays until Pentecost because a great and effective door is open, despite many adversaries (Acts 19).

Concerning Timothy:

• Timothy was young and possibly timid (1 Tim 4:12). Paul exhorts them to receive him without fear, not to despise him, and to send him on in peace.

Concerning Apollos:

• Paul urged Apollos to visit, but Apollos chose not to come at that time. This shows freedom and mutual respect among co-workers and the absence of rivalry.

Verses 13–24 — Final Exhortations, Greetings, and Blessing

13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
14 Let all that you do be done with love.
15 I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—
16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.
17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.
18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.
19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.
20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
21 The salutation with my own hand—Paul's.
22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!
23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Exposition:

Paul closes with strong exhortations and warm greetings:

- Watch — stay spiritually alert against error and temptation.
- Stand fast in the faith — hold firmly to apostolic teaching.
- Be brave, be strong — act with courage and firmness.
- Let all you do be done with love — love governs courage and strength.

Household of Stephanas:

- The first converts of Achaia, devoted to the ministry of the saints. Paul calls for respect and submission to such servant-leaders.

Personal Refreshment:

- Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus refreshed Paul's spirit. The Corinthians are urged to acknowledge faithful men.

Greetings from Others:

- The churches of Asia greet them, as do Aquila and Priscilla and the church in their house. Paul calls them to greet one another with a holy kiss.

Paul's Personal Salutation:

- He authenticates the letter with his own hand. He warns: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed," then prays "Maranatha" — "O Lord, come!"

Final Benediction:

- He ends with grace and love, expressing his deep affection for the church despite their problems